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JAMES MERRILL — A Poem
RONALD TAVEL — Kitchenette (a play)
FREDERICK C. CREWS — Norman O. Brown
LEO BERSANI — Criticism, French Style
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(*Continued on Page* 324)

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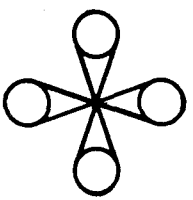

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Susan Sontag

THE PORNOGRAPHIC IMAGINATION

No one should undertake a discussion of pornography before acknowledging the pornographies, of which there are at least three; and before pledging to take them on one at a time. A good deal is gained by treating pornography as an item in social history quite separately from pornography as a psychological phenomenon (according to the usual view, symptomatic of sexual deficiency or deformity in both the producers and the consumers). And everything is to be gained by distinguishing from both of these another pornography—a minor but highly interesting modality or convention within the arts.

It's the last of the three pornographies that I want to focus upon. More narrowly, upon the literary genre for which, lacking a better name, I'm willing to accept (in the privacy of serious intellectual debate, not in the courts) the dubious label of pornography. By literary genre I mean a body of work belonging to literature considered as an art, and to which inherent standards of artistic excellence pertain. From the standpoint of social and psychological phenomena, all pornographic texts have the same status; they are documents. But from the standpoint of art, some of these texts may well become something else. I for one am convinced that not only do Pierre Louys's *Trois Filles et leur Mère,* Georges Bataille's *Histoire de l'Oeil* and *Madame Edwarda,* the pseudonymous *Story of O* and *The Image* belong to literature, but that it can be made clear why these books, all five of them, occupy a much higher rank as literature than Oscar Wilde's *Teleny* or the Earl of Rochester's *Sodom* or Apollinaire's *The Debauched Hospodar* or Cleland's *Fanny Hill*, or *Candy.* The avalanche of pornographic potboilers marketed for two centuries

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under and now, increasingly, over the counter no more impugns the status as literature of at least a dozen pornographic books I have read than the proliferation of books of the caliber of *The Carpetbaggers* and *Valley of the Dolls* throws into question the credentials of *Anna Karenina* and *The Great Gatsby* and *The Man Who Loved Children.* The ratio of authentic literature to trash in pornography may be somewhat lower than the ratio of novels of genuine literary merit to the entire volume of subliterary fiction produced for mass taste. But I doubt that it's any lower than, for instance, that of another somewhat shady subgenre with a few first-rate books to its credit, science fiction. (As literary forms, pornography and science fiction resemble each other in several interesting ways.) Anyway, the quantitative measure supplies a trivial standard. Relatively uncommon as they may be, there are writings which it seems reasonable to call pornographic—assuming that the stale label has any use at all—which, at the same time, cannot be refused accreditation as serious literature.

The point would seem to be obvious. Yet, apparently, that's far from being the case. At least in England and America, the reasoned scrutiny and assessment of pornography is held firmly within the limits of the discourse employed by psychologists, sociologists, historians, jurists, professional moralists and social critics. Pornography is a malady to be diagnosed and an occasion for judgment. It's something one is for or against. And taking sides about pornography is hardly like being for or against aleatoric music or Pop Art, but quite a bit like being for or against legalized abortion or federal aid to parochial schools. In fact, the same fundamental approach to the subject is shared by recent eloquent defenders of society's right and obligation to censor dirty books, like George P. Elliott and George Steiner, and writers, like Paul Goodman, who warn of pernicious consequences of a policy of censorship far worse than any harm done by the books themselves. Both the libertarians and the would-be censors agree in reducing pornography to pathological symptom and problematic social commodity. A near unanimous consensus exists as to what pornography is—this being identified with notions about the *sources* of the impulse to produce and consume these curious goods. As a theme for psychological analysis, pornography is rarely seen as anything more interesting than texts which illustrate a deplorable arrest in normal adult sexual development. On this view, all pornography amounts to is the representation of the fantasies of infantile

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sexual life, these fantasies having been edited by the more skilled, less innocent consciousness of the masturbatory adolescent, for purchase by so-called adults. As a social phenomenon—for instance, the boom in the production of pornography in the societies of Western Europe and America since the eighteenth century—the approach is no less unequivocally clinical. Pornography becomes a group pathology, the disease of a whole culture, about whose cause everyone is pretty well agreed. The mounting output of dirty books is attributed to a festering legacy of Christianity-sponsored sexual repression and to sheer physiological ignorance, these ancient disabilities being now compounded by more proximate historical events, the impact of drastic dislocations in traditional modes of family and political order and unsettling change in the roles of the sexes. (The problem of pornography is one of "the dilemmas of a society in transition," Goodman said in an essay several years ago.) Thus, there is a fairly complete consensus about the *diagnosis* of pornography itself. The disagreements arise only in the estimate of the psychological and social *consequences* of its dissemination, and therefore in the formulating of tactics and policy.

The more enlightened architects of moral policy are undoubtedly prepared to admit that there is something like a "pornographic imagination"; although only in the sense that pornographic works are tokens of a radical failure or deformation of the imagination. And they may grant, as Goodman, Wayland Young and others have suggested, that there also exists a "pornographic society": that, indeed, ours is a flourishing example of one, a society so hypocritically and repressively constructed that it must inevitably produce an effusion of pornography as both its logical expression and its subversive, demotic antidote. But nowhere in the Anglo-American community of letters have I seen it argued that some pornographic books are interesting and important works of art. So long as pornography is treated as only a social and psychological phenomenon and a locus for moral concern, how could such an argument ever be made?

II

There's another reason, apart from this presumption about what pornography is as a topic of analysis, why the question of whether or not works of pornography can be literature has never been genuinely debated. I mean the view of literature itself maintained by most

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English and American critics—a view which in excluding pornographic writings *by definition* from the precincts of literature excludes much else besides.

Of course, no one denies that pornography constitutes a branch of literature in the sense that it can take the form of printed books of fiction. But beyond that trivial correspondence, no more is allowed. The way most critics construe the "nature" of prose literature, no less than their view of the "nature" of pornography, must put pornography in an adverse relation to literature. A pornographic book is defined as one not belonging to literature (and vice versa), which suggests there's no need to examine the books.

One common charge is that the utterly singleminded way in which works of pornography address the reader, proposing to arouse him sexually, is antithetical to the complex function of literature. It may then be argued that pornography's aim, that of inducing sexual excitement, is at odds with the tranquil, detached involvement evoked by genuine art. But this seems particularly unconvincing, in view of the much admired appeal to the reader's moral feelings that "realistic" writing generally intends. It's more plausible to emphasize just the very singleness of pornography's aim, while acknowledging that some certified masterpieces (from Chaucer to Lawrence) do properly excite readers sexually in certain passages or sections. Nevertheless, the argument goes, pornography still possesses only one "intention," while any genuinely valuable work of literature has many.

Another common argument, offered by Adorno among others, is that works of pornography lack the beginning-middle-and-end form characteristic of literature. A piece of pornographic fiction concocts no better than a crude excuse for a beginning; and once having begun, it goes on and on and ends nowhere.

Another argument is that pornographic writing can't evidence any care for its means of expression as such (the concern of literature), since the aim of pornography is to inspire a set of nonverbal fantasies in which language plays a debased, merely instrumental role.

Last and most weighty is the following argument. The subject of literature is something called "the human," that is, the relation of human beings to each other, their complex feelings and emotions; pornography, in contrast, disdains fully formed persons (psychology and social portrayal), is oblivious to the question of motives and their

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credibility and reports only the motiveless tireless transactions of depersonalized organs. Simply extrapolating from the conception of what a work of literature is maintained by most English and American critics writing today, it would follow that the literary value of pornography has to be nil.

But this argument by paradigm simply won't do. Even taking the prevailing concept of literature and applying it to, say, *Story of O*, there's scarcely a single respect in which it fits. Though the novel is thoroughly obscene by the usual standards, and more effective than many in arousing a reader sexually, it can't be said that sexual arousal is the sole function of the situations portrayed. The narrative does have a definite beginning, middle and end. Far from giving the impression that its author considered language a bothersome necessity, the book is written in an elegant, accomplished French (whose quality the translation doesn't put over too well into English). Further, the characters do possess emotions of a very intense kind, although obsessional and indeed wholly asocial ones; characters do have motives, though they are not psychiatrically or socially "normal" motives. The characters in *Story of O* are endowed with a "psychology" of a sort, one derived from the psychology of lust. And while what is learned of the characters within the situations in which they are placed is severely restricted—to modes of sexual concentration and explicitly rendered sexual behavior—O and her partners are, in form, no more reduced or foreshortened than the characters in many nonpornographic works of contemporary fiction.

The fact is, if English and American critics had a more sophisticated view of literature, an interesting debate could get underway. (In the end, this debate would be not only about pornography, but about the whole body of contemporary literature insistently focused on extreme situations and behavior.) The difficulty is that so many critics continue to identify with prose literature itself the particular literary conventions of "realism" (what might be crudely associated with the major tradition of the nineteenth-century novel). For examples of alternative literary modes, one is not confined to appealing only to much of the greatest twentieth-century writing—to *Ulysses*, which is a book not about characters but about media of transpersonal exchange, about all that's outside individual psychology and personal need, to French Surrealism and its most recent offspring, the New Novel, to German "expressionist" fiction, to the Russian post–

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novel represented by Biely's *St. Petersburg* and by Nabokov, or to the nonlinear tenseless narratives of Stein and Burroughs. A definition of literature that faults a work for being rooted in "fantasy" rather than in the realistic rendering of how lifelike persons in familiar situations live with each other couldn't even handle such venerable conventions as the pastoral, which depicts relations between people that could scarcely be more reductive, vapid or unconvincing.

An uprooting of some of these tenacious clichés is long overdue: it will promote a sounder reading of the literature of the past as well as put critics and ordinary readers better in touch with contemporary literature, which includes zones of writing that structurally resemble pornography. It's too easy, virtually meaningless, to demand that literature stick with the "human." For what is at stake is not "human" versus "inhuman" (in which choosing the "human" guarantees instant moral self-congratulation for both author and reader) but an infinitely varied register of forms and tonalities for transposing *the human voice* into prose narrative. From the point of view of criticism, the proper question is not the relationship between the book and "the world" or "reality" (in which each book of fiction is judged as if it were a unique item, and in which the world is taken as a far less complex place than it is) but the complexities of consciousness itself, as the medium through which "a world" exists at all and is constituted, and an approach to single books which doesn't slight the way they exist in dialogue with each other. From this point of view, the decision of the old novelists to depict the unfolding of the destinies of sharply individualized "characters" in familiar, socially dense situations within the conventional notation of chronological sequence is only one of many possible decisions, with no inherently superior claim to the allegiance of serious readers. There is nothing innately more "human" about these procedures of the old novelists. The presence of realistic "characters" isn't, in itself, something wholesome. Nor is it more nourishing for the moral sensibility.

The only sure thing that can be said about characters in prose fiction is that they are, to use the phrase of Henry James, "a compositional resource." The presence of human figures in literary art can serve many purposes. Dramatic tension or three-dimensionality in the rendering of personal and social relations is often *not* what is being aimed at, in which case it doesn't help to insist on that as a generic standard. The presentation of lifelike persons is far from being

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a necessary staple of literature. The exploration of ideas is as authentic an aim of prose fiction, although the adoption of this aim severely limits the representation of persons by the standards of novelistic realism. The constructing or imaging of something inanimate, or of part of the world of nature, is also a valid enterprise, and entails an appropriate rescaling of the human figure. (The form of the pastoral involves a mixture of both these aims: the depiction of ideas and of nature. Persons are used only to the extent that they create a certain kind of landscape, which is partly a stylization of "real" nature and partly a neo-Platonic landscape of ideas.) And equally valid as a subject for prose narrative are the extreme states of human feeling and consciousness, those so peremptory that they exclude the mundane flux of feelings and are only contingently linked with concrete persons—which is the case with pornography.

One would never know, from the confident generalizations on the "nature" of literature set forth by most American and English critics, that a stirring debate on the issue had been going on now for several generations. As Jacques Rivière wrote in the *NRF* in 1924, "It seems to me that we are witnessing a very serious crisis in the concept of what literature is." One of several responses to "the problem of the possibility and the limits of literature," Rivière notes, is the marked tendency for "art (if even the word can still be kept) to become a completely nonhuman activity, a supersensory function, if I may use that term, a sort of creative astronomy." I have cited Rivière not because his essay, "Questioning the Concept of Literature," is particularly original or definitive or subtly argued, but merely to recall to mind that group of radical notions about literature, which were almost critical commonplaces forty years ago in European magazines comparable to *PR*.

To this day, though, that ferment remains something alien, unassimilated and persistently misunderstood in the English and American world of letters: suspected as issuing from a collective cultural failure of nerve, frequently dismissed as outright perversity or obscurantism or creative sterility. The better English-speaking critics could, however, hardly fail to notice how much great twentieth-century literature subverts those ideas received from certain of the great nineteenth-century novelists on the "nature" of literature which they continue to echo in 1967. But the critics' awareness of genuinely new literature was usually tendered in a spirit much like that of the rabbis

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a century before the beginning of the Christian era who, humbly acknowledging the spiritual inferiority of their own age to the age of the great prophets, nevertheless firmly closed the canon of prophetic books and declared—with more relief, one suspects, than regret—the era of prophecy ended. So was the age of what in Anglo-American criticism is still called, astonishingly enough, "experimental" or "avant-garde" writing repeatedly declared to be closed. The ritual celebration of each contemporary genius' undermining of the older notions of literature was often accompanied by the nervous insistence that the writing brought forth was, alas, the last of its noble, sterile line. Now, the results of this intricate one-eyed way of looking at modern literature have been several decades of unparalleled interest and brilliance in English and American—particularly American—criticism. But it is an interest and brilliance that's reared on bankruptcy of taste and something approaching a fundamental dishonesty of method. The critics' retrograde awareness of the impressive new claims staked out by modern literature, linked with their chagrin over what was usually designated as "the rejection of reality" and "the failure of the self" endemic in that literature, indicates the precise point at which most talented Anglo-American literary criticism leaves off considering structures of literature and transposes itself into criticism of culture.

I don't wish to repeat here the arguments that I have advanced elsewhere on behalf of a different critical approach. Still, some allusion to that approach needs to be made. To discuss even a single work of the radical nature of *Histoire de l'Oeil* raises the question of literature itself, of prose narrative considered as an art form. Books like those of Bataille could not have been written except for that intellectual upheaval over the nature of literature which has been taking place in Europe for more than half a century; but lacking that context, they must be almost unassimilable for English and American readers—except as "mere" pornography, mysteriously fancy trash. If it is even necessary to take up the issue of whether or not pornography and literature are antithetical, if it is at all necessary to assert that works of pornography *can* belong to literature, then the assertion has to imply an overall view of what art is.

To put the matter most generally: art (and art-making) is a form of consciousness; the materials of art are the variety of forms of consciousness. And no *esthetic* principle exists by which this notion

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of the materials of art can be construed as excluding even the most extreme forms of consciousness that transcend social personality or psychological individuality.

In daily life, to be sure, we may acknowledge a moral obligation to inhibit such states of consciousness in ourselves. The obligation seems pragmatically sound. Such inhibition on the part of most seems necessary for social order in the widest sense, and seems necessary on the part of each in order to establish and maintain a humane contact with other persons (though that contact can be renounced, for shorter or longer periods). It's well known that when people venture into the extremities of consciousness, they do so at the peril of their sanity, that is to say, of their humanity. But the "human-scale" or humanistic standard proper to ordinary life and conduct seems misplaced when applied to art. It oversimplifies. If within the last century art conceived as an autonomous activity has come to be invested with an unprecedented stature—the nearest thing to a sacramental human activity acknowledged by a secular society—it is because one of the things art has elected to do is to make forays into and take up positions on the frontiers of consciousness (often very dangerous to the artist as a person) and to report back what's there. Being a free-lance explorer of spiritual dangers, the artist is given a certain license to behave differently from other people; matching the singularity of his vocation, he may or may not be decked out with a suitably eccentric life style. But his main job is to invent trophies of his experiences—objects and gestures that fascinate and enthrall, not merely (as older notions of the artist would have it) edify or entertain. His principal means of fascinating is to advance one step further in the dialectic of outrage. To make his work repulsive, obscure, inaccessible; in short, to give what is, or seems to be, *not* wanted. But however fierce may be the outrages he perpetrates upon his audience, the artist's credentials and spiritual authority ultimately depend on the audience's sense (whether something known or inferred) of the outrages he commits upon himself. The exemplary modern artist is a broker in madness.

The notion of art as the dearly-purchased fruits of an immense spiritual risk, one whose cost goes up with the entry and participation of each new player in the game, invites a new set of critical standards. Certainly, the art produced under the aegis of this conception is not, cannot be, "realistic." But words that merely invert

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the guide-lines of realism—like "fantasy" or "surrealism"—don't clarify much. Fantasy all too easily declines into "mere" fantasy; the clincher is the adjective "infantile." Where does fantasy, condemned by psychiatric rather than artistic standards, end and imagination begin?

Since it's hardly likely that most contemporary critics seriously mean to bar prose narratives that are unrealistic from the domain of literature, one suspects that a special standard is being applied to sexual themes. Transfer to another kind of book, another kind of "fantasy," and the matter becomes clear. The ahistorical dreamlike landscape in which action is situated, the peculiarly congealed time in which acts are performed—these occur almost as often in science fiction as they do in pornography. There is nothing very remarkable in the fact that most men and women fall short of the sexual prowess people in pornography are represented as enjoying; that size of organs, number and duration of orgasms, variety and feasibility of sexual postures and amount of sexual energy available all seem grossly exaggerated. Yes, and the spaceships and the teeming planets depicted in science-fiction novels don't exist either. That the site of narrative is an ideal *topos* doesn't disqualify either pornography or science fiction from being literature. Such negations of real, concrete, three-dimensional social time, space and personality—and such "fantastic" enlargements of human energy—are rather the ingredients of another kind of literature, founded on another mode of consciousness.

The materials that go into the pornographic books which count as a branch of literature are, precisely, one of the extreme forms of human consciousness. Of course, many people would agree that the sexually-obsessed consciousness can, in principle, enter into literature considered as an art form. Literature about lust? Why not? But then they usually add a rider to the agreement which effectually nullifies it. What's asked is that the author of such a work have the proper "distance" from his obsessions for their rendering to count as literature. This is a hypocritical standard, revealing once again that the values most people employ to deal with pornography are, in the end, those belonging to psychiatry and social affairs rather than to art. (Since Christianity upped the ante and concentrated on sexual behavior as the core of virtue, everything pertaining to sex has been a "special case" in our culture, evoking peculiarly inconsistent attitudes.) Van Gogh's paintings are not considered less admirable nor

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does their status as art become dubious because there is reason to think that his manner of painting had less to do with a conscious choice of representational means, according to esthetic or art-history standards, than with the fact that he was deranged and actually saw reality the way he painted. Similarly, *Histoire de l'Oeil* does not become case history rather than art because the extraordinary autobiographical essay appended to the narrative reveals that these obscene obsessions are indeed Bataille's own.

What makes a work of pornography part of the history of art rather than of trash is not distance, the superimposition of a consciousness more conformable to that of ordinary reality upon the "deranged consciousness" of the erotically obsessed. It is rather the originality, thoroughness, authenticity and power of that "deranged consciousness" itself, as it is incarnated in a work. From the point of view of art, the exclusivity of the consciousness embodied in pornographic books is, in itself, neither anomalous nor antiliterary.

Nor is its purported aim or effect (whether it is intentional or not)—to excite the reader sexually—a defect. Only by following a degraded and mechanistic idea of sex could one be mislead into thinking that to be sexually stirred by a book like *Madame Edwarda* is a simple matter. That singleness of intention often condemned by critics is, when the work of pornography merits treatment as art, compounded of many resonances. The physical sensations involuntarily produced in the reader carry with them something that touches upon the reader's whole experience of his humanity—and his limits as a personality and as a body. Actually, the singleness of pornography's intention is spurious. But the aggressiveness of the intention is not. What seems in pornography like an end is as much a means, startlingly and oppressively concrete. The end, though, is less concrete. Pornography is one of the branches of literature—science fiction is another—aiming at disorientation, at psychic dislocation.

In some respects, the use of sexual obsessions as a subject for literature resembles that of a subject whose validity far fewer people would contest: religious obsessions. So compared, the familiar fact of pornography's definite, aggressive impact upon its readers looks somewhat different. Its celebrated intention of sexually stimulating readers is really a species of proselytizing. Pornography that is serious literature aims to "excite" in the same way that books which render an extreme form of religious experience aim to "convert."

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III

Two French books recently translated into English, *Story of O* and *The Image*, conveniently illustrate some issues involved in the topic, barely explored in Anglo-American criticism, of pornography as a branch of serious literature.

Story of O by "Pauline Réage" was published in Paris in 1954, and immediately became famous, partly due to the patronage of Jean Paulhan, who wrote the preface. It was widely believed that Paulhan had written the book, too—perhaps because of the precedent set by Bataille, who had contributed an essay (signed with his own name) to his *Madame Edwarda* when it was first published in 1941 under the pseudonym "Pierre Angelique," and also because Pauline suggested Paulhan. But Paulhan has always denied that he wrote *Story of O*, insisting that it was indeed by a woman, someone living in another part of France who didn't wish her name known. Though Paulhan's story about the unambitious provincial author was not generally believed, the conviction that it was he who wrote the book eventually faded. In the years since, a number of more ingenious hypotheses, attributing the book's authorship to other figures on the Paris literary scene, gained credence; and then were dropped. The real identity of "Pauline Réage" remains one of the few well-kept secrets in contemporary letters.

The Image came out two years later, in 1956, also under a pseudonym, "Jean de Berg," and, to compound the mystery, dedicated to and with a preface by "Pauline Réage," who has not been heard from since. (The preface by "Réage" is terse and forgettable; the one by Paulhan is long and very interesting.) Speculation at Paris literary parties about the identity of "Jean de Berg" is at least more restful than the gossip about "Pauline Réage." One rumor only, which names the wife of an influential younger novelist, has swept the field.

It's not unreasonable that those curious enough to speculate about the real people behind the two pseudonyms should regularly come up with some name from the established community of letters in France. That either of these two books should be an amateur's stroke of genius is almost inconceivable. Both, but particularly *Story of O*, are highly "literary" books. By this I mean that, different as one is from the other, both *Story of O* and *The Image* evince a quality in the writing that can't be ascribed simply to an

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abundance of the usual writerly endowments of sensibility, energy and intelligence. Such gifts were surely present, but one is also aware of the extent to which these gifts have themselves been processed through a dialogue of artifices. The degree of somber self-consciousness with which the narratives are executed could hardly be farther from the lack of control and craft usually considered as accompanying the expression of obsessive lust. The fact is that, intoxicating as is their subject (if the reader doesn't cut off and find it just funny or sinister), both narratives have more to do with the "use" of erotic material than with the "expression" of it. And this use is preeminently—there is no other word for it—literary. The imagination pursuing its outrageous pleasures in *Story of O* and *The Image* is firmly anchored to certain notions of the *formal* consummation of intense feeling, of procedures for exhausting an experience, that connect as much with literature and recent literary history as with the ahistorical domain of eros. And why not? Experiences aren't pornographic; only expressions and representations—structures of the imagination—are. This is why what a pornographic book can make the reader think of, mainly, is other pornographic books, rather than sex unmediated—and this not necessarily to the detriment of his erotic excitement.

To take only one of many connections with the idea of literature as such projected by *Story of O*: what resonates throughout the book is a voluminous body of pornographic or "libertine" literature, mostly trash, in both French and English, going back to the eighteenth century. The most obvious reference is to Sade. But here one must not think only of the writings of Sade himself, but of the reinterpretation of Sade by French literary intellectuals after World War II, a critical gesture perhaps comparable in its importance and influence upon educated literary taste and upon the actual direction of serious fiction in France to the reappraisal of James launched just before World War II in the United States, except that the French reappraisal has lasted longer and seems to have struck deeper roots. (Sade, of course, had never been forgotten. He was read enthusiastically by Flaubert, Baudelaire and most of the other radical geniuses of French literature of the second half of the nineteenth century. He was one of the patron saints of the Surrealist movement, and figures importantly in the thought of Breton. But it was the writings after 1945 that really consolidated Sade's position as an inexhaustible point

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of departure for radical thinking about the possibilities of the human condition. The well-known essay of Beauvoir, the indefatigable scholarly biography undertaken by Gilbert Lely and writings as yet untranslated by Blanchot, Paulhan, Bataille, Klossowski and Leiris constitute the most eminent documents of the postwar reevaluation which secured this astonishingly hardy modification of French literary sensibility. The quality and theoretical density of the French interest in Sade remains virtually incomprehensible to English and American literary intellectuals, for whom Sade is perhaps an exemplary figure in the history of psychopathology, both individual and social, but inconceivable as someone to be taken seriously, in an ahistorical context, as a "thinker.")

But it's not only Sade, and both the problems he raised and the ones raised in his name, that stands behind *Story of O*. There are also the conventions of the "libertine" potboilers written in nineteenth-century France, such as those which take place in a fantasy England populated by brutal aristocrats with enormous sexual equipment and violent tastes, along the axis of sadomasochism, to match. The name of O's second lover-proprietor, Sir Stephen, is clearly a reference, a kind of homage, to this highly period fantasy, as is the Sir Edmond of *Histoire de l'Oeil*. What's important to note is that the allusion to a stock type of pornographic trash stands, as a literary reference, on exactly the same footing as the anachronistic setting of most of the action, which is lifted straight from Sade's books. The narrative opens in Paris with O joining her lover René in a car and driving around, but most of the subsequent action is removed to more familiar if less plausible territory: that conveniently isolated chateau, luxuriously furnished and lavishly staffed with servants, where a group of rich men congregate and to which women are brought as virtual slaves in order to be the objects, shared in common, of the men's brutal and inventive lust. There are whips and chains, masks worn by the men when the women are admitted to their presence, great fires burning in the hearth, unspeakable sexual indignities, floggings and more ingenious kinds of physical mutilation, several lesbian scenes when the excitement of the orgies in the great drawing room seem to flag. In short, the novel comes equipped with some of the creakiest items in the repertoire of pornography.

How seriously are we to take this? A bare inventory of the plot might give the impression that *Story of O* is not so much pornography

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as metapornography, a brilliant parody. Something similar was urged in defense of *Candy* when it was published here several years ago, after some years of more modest existence in Paris as a more or less official dirty book. *Candy* wasn't pornography, it was argued, but a spoof, a witty burlesque of the conventions of cheap pornographic narrative. A good try, but it isn't so. *Candy* may be funny, but it's still pornography. For pornography isn't a form which can parody itself. It is the nature of the pornographic imagination to prefer readymade conventions of character, setting and action. Pornography is a theater of types, never of individuals. A parody of pornography always remains pornography (so far as it's at all competent). Indeed, parody is one common form of pornographic writing. Sade himself often used it, inverting the moralistic fictions of Richardson in which female virtue always triumphs over male lewdness, either by saying no or by dying afterwards. With *Story of O*, it would be more accurate to speak of a "use" rather than of a parody of Sade.

The tone alone of *Story of O* indicates that whatever in the book might be read as parody or antiquarianism—a mandarin pornography?—is only one of several elements forming the narrative. (Although sexual situations encompassing all the expectable variations of lust are graphically described, the prose style is rather formal, the level of language dignified and almost chaste.) Features of the Sadean staging are used to shape the action, but the narrative's basic line differs fundamentally from anything Sade wrote. Consider his *120 Days of Sodom,* probably the most ambitious pornographic book ever conceived (in terms of scale), a kind of summa of the pornographic imagination; stunningly impressive and upsetting, even in the truncated form, part narrative and part scenario, in which it has survived. (The manuscript was accidentally rescued from the Bastille after Sade had been forced to leave it behind when he was transferred in 1789 to Charenton, but Sade believed until his death that his masterpiece had been destroyed when the prison was razed.) Sade's express train of outrages tears along an interminable but level track. His descriptions are too schematic to be sensuous. The actions of the book are illustrations, rather, of his relentlessly repeated ideas. Yet these polemical ideas themselves seem, eventually, more like principles of a dramaturgy than a serious theory. Sade's ideas—of the person as a "thing" or an "object," of the body as a machine and of the orgy as an inventory of the hopefully indefinite possibilities

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of several machines in collaboration with each other—seems mainly designed to make possible an endless, nonculminating kind of ultimately affectless activity. In contrast, there is a definite movement in *Story of O*; a logic of events, as opposed to Sade's static principle of the catalogue or encyclopedia. This plot movement is certainly abetted by the fact that, for most of the narrative, the author tolerates at least a vestige of the unit of "the couple" (O and René, O and Sir Stephen)—a unit generally repudiated in pornographic literature.

And, of course, the figure of O herself is different. Her feelings, however insistently they adhere to one theme, have some modulation and are carefully described. If O is passive, she is scarcely like those ninnies in Sade's tales who are detained in remote castles to be tormented by cliques of pitiless noblemen and satanic priests. And O is represented as active, too; literally active, as in the seduction of Jacqueline, and more important, profoundly active in her own passivity. Only superficially does O resemble her predecessors in Sade's writings. There is never any personal consciousness, except that of the author, in Sade's books. But O does possess a consciousness, from which vantage point her story is told. (Although written in the third person, the narrative never departs from O's point of view or understands more than she understands.) Sade's effort is to neutralize sexuality of all its personal associations, to represent a kind of impersonal—or pure—sexual encounter. But the narrative of "Pauline Réage" does show O reacting in quite different ways (including love) to different people, notably to René, to Sir Stephen, to Jacqueline and to Anne-Marie.

Sade, of course, is more representative of the major conventions of pornographic writing. So far as the pornographic imagination tends to make one person interchangeable with another and all people interchangeable with things, it's not functional to describe a person as O is described—in terms of a certain state of her will (which she's trying to discard) and of her understanding. Pornography is mainly populated by creatures like Sade's Justine, endowed with neither will, intelligence nor even, apparently, memory. Justine lives in a perpetual state of astonishment, never learning anything from the strikingly repetitious violations of her innocence. After each fresh betrayal she gets in place for another round, as uninstructed by her experience as ever, ready to trust the next masterful libertine and

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be rewarded for it by a renewed loss of liberty, the same indignities and the same blasphemous sermons in praise of vice.

For the most part, the figures who play the role of sexual objects in pornography are made of the same stuff as a principal "humour" of comedy. Justine is like Candide, who is also a cipher, a blank, an eternal naïf who can learn nothing from his atrocious ordeals. The familiar structure of comedy which features a character who is a kind of still center in the midst of outrage (Buster Keaton is a classic image) crops up repeatedly in pornography. The personages in pornography, like those of comedy, are seen only from the outside, behavioristically. By definition, they can't be seen in depth, so as truly to engage the audience's feelings. In much of comedy, the joke resides precisely in the *disparity* between the understated or anesthetized feeling and a large outrageous event. Pornography works in a similar fashion. What's gained by a deadpan tone, by what seems to the reader in an ordinary state of consciousness to be the incredible *under*reacting of most of the characters to the situations in which they're placed, isn't the release of laughter. It's the release of a sexual reaction, originally voyeuristic but probably needing to be secured by an underlying direct identification with one of the participants in the sexual act. The emotional flatness of pornography is thus neither a failure of artistry nor an index of principled inhumanity. The arousal of a sexual response in the reader *requires* it. Only in the absence of directly stated emotions is the reader of pornography likely to have room for his own responses. When the event narrated comes already festooned with the author's explicitly avowed sentiments, the reader may be stirred by those sentiments. But it's harder to be stirred by the event itself.[1]

Silent film comedy offers many illustrations of how the formal principle of continual agitation or perpetual motion (slapstick) and that of the deadpan really amount to the same thing—a deadening or neutralization or distancing of the audience's emotions, its ability to identify in a "humane" way and to bring moral judgments (etc.)

1. This is very clear in the case of Genet's books which, despite the explicitness of the sexual experiences related, are not sexually arousing for most readers. What the reader knows (and Genet has stated it many times) is that Genet himself was sexually excited while writing *The Miracle of the Rose*, *Our Lady of the Flowers*, etc. The reader makes an intense and unsettling contact with Genet's erotic excitement, which is the energy that propels these metaphor-studded narratives; but, at the same time, the author's excitement precludes the reader's own. Genet was perfectly correct when he said that his books were not pornographic.

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about situations of violence. The same principle is at work in all pornography. It's not that the characters in pornography cannot conceivably possess any emotions. They can. Still, the principles of underreacting and frenetic agitation make the emotional climate self-canceling, so that the basic tone of pornography is affectless, emotionless.

However, degrees of this affectlessness can be distinguished. Justine is the stereotype sex-object figure (invariably female, since most pornography is written by men or from the stereotyped male point of view): a bewildered victim, whose consciousness, as I have said, is never changed in the slightest by her experiences. But O is an adept; grateful, whatever the cost in pain and fear, for the opportunity to be initiated into a mystery. That mystery is the loss of the self. O learns, she suffers, she changes. Step by step she becomes more what she is, a process identical with the emptying out of herself. In the vision of the world presented by *Story of O*, the highest good is the transcendence of personality. The plot's movement is not horizontal, but a kind of ascent through degradation. O does not simply become identical with her sexual availability, but wants to reach the perfection of becoming an "object." Her condition, if it can be characterized as one of "dehumanization," is not to be understood as a by-product of her situation of enslavement to René, Sir Stephen and the other men at Roissy. It's exactly the point of her situation, something she seeks and eventually attains. Her achievement is represented in the last scene of the book when she's led to a party, mutilated, in chains, unrecognizable, costumed (as an owl)—so convincingly no longer human that none of the guests even thinks of speaking to her directly.

O's quest is neatly summed up in the expressive letter which serves her for a name. "O" suggests a cartoon of her sex, not her individual sex but simply woman; it also stand for the void, a vacuity, a nothing. But what *Story of O* unfolds is a spiritual paradox, that of the full void and of the vacuity that is also a plenum. The power of the book lies exactly in the anguish stirred up by the continuing presence of this paradox. "Pauline Réage" raises, in a far more organic and sophisticated manner than Sade does with his clumsy expositions and discourses, the question of the status of human personality itself. But whereas Sade is interested in the obliteration of personality from the viewpoint of power and liberty, the author

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of *Story of O* is interested in the obliteration of personality from the viewpoint of happiness. (The closest thing to a statement of this theme we possess in English literature are certain passages in Lawrence's *The Lost Girl.*)

For the paradox to gain real significance, however, depends on at least glimpsing a view of sex different from that held by most enlightened members of the community. The prevailing view—an amalgam of Rousseauist, Freudian and liberal social thought—estimates the phenomenon of sex as a perfectly intelligible although uniquely precious source of emotional and physical pleasure. What difficulties there are come from the long deformation of the sexual impulses administered by Western Christianity, whose ugly wounds scarcely anyone in this culture escapes. First, guilt and anxiety. Then, the reduction of sexual capacities leading if not to virtual impotence or frigidity, at least to the depletion of erotic energy and the repression of many natural elements of sexual appetite (the "perversions"). Then the spill-over into public dishonesties in which people tend to respond to news of the sexual pleasures of others with envy, fascination, revulsion and spiteful indignation. It's from this pollution of the sexual health of the culture that a phenomenon like pornography is derived.

Now, what's decisive in the complex of views held by most educated members of the community is the assumption that human sexual appetite is, if untampered with, a natural pleasant function; and that "the obscene" is a convention, the fiction imposed upon nature by a society convinced that there is something vile about the sexual functions, and by extension, about sexual pleasure. It's just these assumptions that are challenged by the French tradition represented by Sade, Lautréamont, Bataille and the authors of *Story of O* and *The Image*. Their assumption seems to be that "the obscene" is a primal notion of human consciousness, something much more profound than the backwash of a sick society's aversion to the body. Human sexuality is, quite apart from Christian repressions, etc., a highly questionable phenomenon, and belongs, at least potentially, among the extreme rather than the ordinary experiences of humanity. Tamed as it may be, sexuality remains one of the demonic forces in human consciousness—pushing us at intervals close to taboo and dangerous desires, which range from the impulse to commit sudden arbitrary violence upon another person to the voluptuous yearning

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for the extinction of one's consciousness, for death itself. Even on the level of simple physical sensation and mood, making love surely resembles having an epileptic fit at least as much, if not more, than it does eating a meal or conversing with someone. Everyone has felt (at least in fantasy) the erotic glamor of physical cruelty and an erotic lure in things which are vile and repulsive. These phenomena are part of the genuine spectrum of sexuality, and if they are not to be written off as mere neurotic aberrations, the picture may look different from the one promoted by enlightened public opinion, and less simple.

It almost seems as if it's for good reason that most people's whole capacity for sexual ecstasy is inaccessible to them, given that each person's sexuality is something, like nuclear energy, that may prove amenable to domestication through scruple, but then again, it may not. That most people do not regularly, or perhaps ever, experience their sexual capacities at this unsettling pitch doesn't mean that the extreme isn't authentic, or that the possibility of it doesn't haunt them anyway. (Religion is probably, after sex, the second oldest resource which human beings have available to them for blowing their minds. Yet among the multitudes of the pious, the number who have ventured very far with that state of consciousness must be fairly small, too.) There is, demonstrably, something incorrectly designed and potentially disorienting in the human sexual capacity—at least in the capacities of man-in-civilization. Man, the sick animal, bears within him an appetite which can drive him mad. And it's that understanding of sexuality as something beyond good and evil, beyond love, beyond sanity, sexuality as a resource for ordeal and for breaking through limits of consciousness, that informs the French books which I've been talking about.

The *Story of O*, with its project for completely transcending the idea of personality, rests on this dark and complex vision of sexuality—so far removed from the hopeful view sponsored by American Freudianism and liberal culture. The woman who is given no other name than "O" progresses simultaneously toward her own extinction as a human being and her fulfillment as a sexual being. It's hard to know how anyone would ascertain whether there is truly anything in "nature" or human consciousness that supports such a split. But, surely, the possibility has always haunted man, as accustomed as he is to decrying such a split.

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O's project enacts, on another scale, no more than what's performed by the existence of pornographic literature itself. What pornographic literature does is precisely to drive a wedge between one's existence as a full human being and one's existence as a sexual being—while in ordinary life one hopes to prevent such a wedge from being driven. Normally we don't experience, at least don't want to experience, our sexual fulfillment as distinct from or opposed to our personal fulfillment. But perhaps in part they are distinct, whether we like it or not. Insofar as strong sexual feeling does involve an obsessive degree of attention, it surely does contain experiences in which one can feel one is losing one's "self." The literature that goes from Sade through Surrealism to these more recent books precisely capitalizes on that mystery, isolates that and makes the reader aware of it, invites him to participate in it.

This literature is both an invocation of the erotic in its darkest sense and, in certain cases, an exorcism. The devout, solemn mood of *Story of O* is fairly unrelieved; an example of a work of mixed moods on the same theme of a journey toward the estrangement of the self from the self is Buñuel's film *L'Age d'Or*. Perhaps it would be worth positing that pornography as a literary form works with both a pattern equivalent to tragedy (as in *Story of O*) in which the erotic subject-victim heads inexorably toward death and an equivalent to comedy (as in *The Image*) in which the obsessional pursuit of sexual exercise is rewarded by a terminal gratification, union with the uniquely desired sexual partner.

IV

Bataille is the writer who works with a darker sense of the erotic, its perils of fascination and humiliation, than probably anyone. His *Histoire de l'Oeil* (first published in 1921) and *Madame Edwarda* (1941),[2] qualify as pornographic books so far as their theme is sexual quest, an all-engrossing quest which annihilates every consideration of persons extraneous to their roles in the sexual dramaturgy, and the fulfillment of this quest is depicted graphically. But

2. It's unfortunate that the only translation available in this country of what purports to be *Madame Edwarda,* that included in *The Olympia Reader,* pp. 662-673, published by Grove Press two years ago, gives just half the work. Only the *récit* is translated. But *Madame Edwarda* isn't a *récit* padded out with a preface also by Bataille. It is a two-part invention—essay and *récit*—and one part is almost unintelligible without the other.

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this conveys nothing of their extraordinary quality. For sheer explicitness about sexual organs and acts is in no sense necessarily obscene; it only becomes so when delivered in a particular tone, when it has acquired a certain moral resonance. As it happens, the sparse number of sexual acts and quasi-sexual defilements related in Bataille's novellas can hardly compete, either in number or variety, with the interminable mechanistic inventiveness of the *120 Days of Sodom*. Yet what he describes seems somehow more potent and outrageous than the most lurid orgies that Sade could stage, because Bataille possessed a much finer and more profound sense of transgression.

One reason that *Histoire de l'Oeil* and *Madame Edwarda* make such an extreme and upsetting impression is that Bataille understood more clearly than anyone else that what pornography is really about, ultimately, isn't sex, but death. This is not to suggest that every pornographic work speaks, either overtly or covertly, of death. Only those works which deal with that specific and strongest inflection of the themes of lust, "the obscene," do. It's toward the gratifications of death, succeeding and surpassing those of eros, that every truly obscene quest tends. (An example of a pornographic work that isn't about the "obscene" is Louys's jolly saga of sexual insatiability, *Trois Filles et leur Mère*. *The Image* presents a less clear-cut case. While the enigmatic transactions between the three characters are charged with a sense of the obscene—more like a premonition, since the obscene is reduced to being only a constituent of voyeurism—the upshot is an unequivocally happy ending, with the narrator finally united with Claire. In *Story of O* there is another sort of problem. The book ends ambiguously, with several lines to the effect that two versions of a final supressed chapter exist, in one of which O received Sir Stephen's permission to die when he was about to discard her. Although this double ending satisfyingly echoes the book's opening, in which two versions "of the same beginning" are given, it shouldn't, I think, shake the reader's sense that O is death-bound, whatever doubts the author expresses about her fate.)

Bataille's books, the chamber music of pornographic literature, are usually in *récit* form (sometimes accompanied by an essay). Their unifying theme is Bataille's own consciousness, a consciousness in an acute, unrelenting state of agony; but as an equally extraordinary mind in an earlier age might have written a theology of agony, Bataille has written an erotics of agony. Willing to tell something of the

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autobiographical sources of his narratives, he appended to *Histoire de l'Oeil* some memories of his own outrageously terrible childhood. (One memory: his blind, syphilitic, insane father trying unsuccessfully to urinate.) Time has neutralized these memories, he explains; after many years, they have largely lost their power over him and "can only come to life again, deformed, hardly recognizable, having in the course of this deformation, taken on an obscene meaning." Thus, for Bataille, "the obscene" simultaneously revives what is most painful and scores a victory over that pain. And of necessity, he must deal with the extremity of the erotic experience. Human beings, he says in the essay part of *Madame Edwarda*, live only through "excess." And pleasure depends on "perspective," or giving oneself to a state of "open being," open to death as well as to joy. Most people, Bataille notes, try to outwit their own feelings; they want to be receptive to pleasure but keep "horror" at a distance. That's foolish, he argues, since horror reinforces "attraction" and excites desire.

What the extremity of the erotic experience means for Bataille is its subterranean connection with death. It's not that Bataille litters his narratives with corpses. (For instance, only one person dies in the terrifying *Histoire de l'Oeil*; and the book ends with the three central characters, having debauched their way through France and Spain, acquiring a yacht at Gibraltar to pursue their infamies elsewhere.) What Bataille does is more effective. He invests each action with a weight, a disturbing gravity, that feels authentically "mortal."

Yet despite the obvious differences of scale and finesse of execution, there are some resemblances between the conceptions of Sade and Bataille. For instance, Sade, like Bataille, was not so much a sensualist as someone with an intellectual project: to explore the scope of transgression. And he shares with Bataille the same ultimate identification of sex and death. But Sade could never have written what Bataille did: "The truth of eroticism is tragic." People often die in Sade's books. But these deaths never seem real. They're no more convincing than those mutilations inflicted during the evening's orgies from which the victims recover completely the next morning following the use of a wondrous salve. One is continually caught up short by Sade's bad faith about death. (Of course, many pornographic books which are much less interesting and accomplished than those of Sade share this bad faith.)

Indeed, one might speculate that the fatiguing repetitiveness of

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Sade's books is the consequence of his imaginative failure to confront the inevitable goal or haven of a truly systematic venture of the pornographic imagination. Death is the only end to the odyssey of the pornographic imagination when it becomes systematic; that is, when it comes to be focused on the pleasures of transgression rather than mere pleasure itself. Since he could not or would not arrive at his ending, Sade stalled. He multiplied and thickened his narrative; tediously reduplicated orgiastic permutations and combinations. And he regularly interrupted a bout of rape or buggery to deliver to his victims his latest reworkings of lengthy sermons on what real "Enlightenment" means—the nasty truth about God, society, nature, the individual, virtue. Bataille manages to eschew anything resembling the counter-idealisms which are Sade's blasphemies (and thereby perpetuate the banished idealism lying behind those fantasies); his blasphemies are autonomous.

Sade's books, the Wagnerian music-dramas of pornographic literature, are neither subtle nor compact. Bataille achieves his effects with far more economical means: a chamber ensemble of noninterchangeable personages instead of Sade's operatic multiplication of sexual virtuosi and professional victims. Extreme compression is the artistic means which Bataille chooses to render his radical negatives. And it works. This is why Bataille's lean work and gnomic thought go farther than Sade's. Even in pornography, less can be more.

Bataille also has offered distinctly original and effective solutions to one of the perennial formal problems of pornographic narration: the ending. The most common procedure has been an end which lay no claim to any internal necessity. Hence, Adorno remarked that pornography has neither beginning, middle nor end. But it does. That the end is abrupt and, by conventional novel standards, unmotivated, is not necessarily objectionable. (The discovery, midway in a science-fiction novel, of an alien planet may be no less abrupt or unmotivated.) Abruptness, an endemic facticity of encounters and chronically renewing encounters, is not some unfortunate defect of the pornographic narration which one might wish removed in order for the books to qualify as literature. These features are constitutive of the very imagination or vision of the world which goes into pornography. They supply, in many cases, exactly the ending that's needed.

But this doesn't preclude other types of endings. One notable

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feature of *Histoire de l'Oeil* and, to a lesser extent, *The Image*, considered as works of art, is their attempt to find more systematic or rigorous kinds of ending. And to do this, still within the terms of the pornographic imagination; not seduced by the solutions of a more realistic or less abstract fiction.

What seems to be entailed is the construction of a narrative which is, from the beginning, more rigorously controlled; less spontaneous and lavishly descriptive.

In *The Image* the narrative is controlled by a single metaphor, "the image" (though the reader doesn't understand the full meaning of the title until he has reached the end of the novel). At first, the metaphor appears to have a clear single application. "Image" seems to be used in the sense of "flat" object or "two-dimensional surface" or "passive reflection"—all referring to the girl Anne whom Claire instructs the narrator to use freely for his own sexual purposes, making the girl into "a perfect slave." But exactly in the middle of the book ("Section V" in a short book of ten sections), an enigmatic scene is interposed which introduces another sense of "image." Claire, alone with the narrator, wants to show him a set of strangely unintelligible photographs of Anne in obscene situations; and these are described in such a way as to insinuate a mystery in what has been a brutally straightforward, if seemingly unmotivated, situation. From this cæsura forward to the end of the book, the reader will have to carry simultaneously the awareness of the fictionally actual "obscene" situation being described and of some kind of oblique mirroring or reduplication of that situation. That burden (the two perspectives) will then be relieved in the final pages of the book, when, as the title of the last section has it, "Everything Resolves Itself." Anne is discovered to be not the erotic plaything of Claire donated gratuitously to the narrator, but Claire's "image" or "projection," sent out ahead to teach the narrator how to love *her*.

The structure of *Histoire de l'Oeil* is no less rigorous, and more ambitious in scope. It's interesting that both novels are in the first person; in both, the narrator is male, and one of a trio whose sexual interconnections constitute the story of the book. But the principles by which the two narratives are organized don't resemble each other at all. "Jean de Berg" describes how something came to be known that was not known by the narrator; all the pieces of action are clues, bits of evidence; and the ending is a surprise. Bataille is de-

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scribing an action which is really intrapsychic: three people sharing (without conflict) a single fantasy, the acting out of a collective perverse will. The emphasis in *The Image* is on behavior, which is opaque, unintelligible. The emphasis in *Histoire de l'Oeil* is on fantasy first, and then on its correlation with some spontaneously "invented" act. The development of the book follows the phases of acting out. Bataille is charting the stages of the gratification of an erotic obsession, which haunts a number of commonplace objects or things. The principle of organization is thus a spatial one: a series of objects, arranged in a definite sequence, are tracked down, used or used up in some convulsive erotic act. The obscene playing with or defiling of these objects, and of people in their vicinity, is the action of the novella. When the last object (the eye) is used up in a transgression more daring than any preceding, the narrative ends. There can be no revelation or surprises in the story, no new "knowledge," only further intensifications of what is already known. These seemingly unrelated elements really are related; in fact, all versions of the same thing. The egg in the first chapter is simply the first version of the eyeball plucked from the Spaniard in the last.

Each specific erotic fantasy is also a generic fantasy, of performing what is "forbidden," which generates a surplus atmosphere of excruciating restless sexual intensity. At times the reader seems to be witness to a heartless debauched fulfillment; at other times, simply in attendance at the remorseless progress of the negative. Bataille's works, better than any others I know of, indicate the esthetic possibilities of pornography as an art form. *Histoire de l'Oeil* is, in my opinion, the most perfect artistically of all the pornographic prose fictions I've read; *Madame Edwarda,* the most original and powerful intellectually.

To speak of the esthetic possibilities of pornography as an art form and as a form of thinking may seem insensitive or grandiose when one thinks of the acute misery of those afflicted in real life with a full-time specialized sexual obsession. Still, I would argue that pornography yields more than the truths of individual nightmare. Convulsive and repetitious as this form of the imagination may be, it does generate a vision of the world that can claim the interest (speculative, esthetic) of those who are not erotomanes. Indeed, this claim resides in precisely what are customarily dismissed as the *limits* of pornographic thinking.

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V

The prominent characteristic of all products of the pornographic imagination is their energy and their absolutism.

The books generally called pornographic are books whose primary, exclusive and overriding preoccupation is with the depiction of sexual "intentions" and "activities." One could also say sexual "feelings," except that the word seems redundant. For most of the personages deployed by the pornographic imagination, their "feelings" at any given moment are either identical with their "behavior" or else a preparatory phase, that of "intention," just about to break into "behavior" unless physically thwarted. There is a small crude vocabulary of feeling, all relating to the prospects of action. One feels that one would like to act (lust). One feels that one would not like to act (shame, fear). There are no gratuitous or nonfunctioning feelings; no musings, whether speculative or imagistic, which are irrelevant to the business at hand. Thus, the pornographic imagination inhabits a universe that is, however repetitive the incidents which occur within it, incomparably economical. The strictest possible criterion of relevance applies: everything must somehow bear upon the erotic situation.

The universe proposed by the pornographic imagination is a total universe. It has the power to ingest and metamorphose and translate all concerns that are fed into it, reducing everything into the one negotiable currency of the erotic imperative. All action is conceived of as a set of sexual *exchanges*. Thus, the reason why pornography refuses to make fixed distinctions between the sexes or allow any kind of sexual preference or sexual taboo to endure can be explained "structurally." The bisexuality, the disregard for the incest taboo and other similar features common to pornographic narratives function to multiply the possibilities of exchange. Ideally, it should be possible for everyone to have a sexual connection with everyone else.

Of course the pornographic imagination is hardly the only form of the imagination that proposes a total universe. Another example is the type of imagination that has generated modern symbolic logic. In the total universe proposed by the logician's imagination, all statements can be broken down or chewed up to make it possible to rerender them in the form of the logical language; those parts of ordinary language that don't fit are simply lopped off. Certain of

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the well-known states of the religious imagination, to take another example, operate in the same cannibalistic way, engorging all materials made available to them for retranslation into phenomena saturated with the religious polarities (sacred and profane, etc.).

The latter example, for obvious reasons, touches closely to the present subject. Religious metaphors abound in a good deal of modern erotic literature (in Genet, among others) and in some works of pornographic literature, too. *Story of O*, particularly, is filled with religious metaphors for the ordeal that O undergoes. O "wanted to believe." Her drastic condition of total personal servitude to those who use her sexually is repeatedly described as a mode of salvation. With anguish and anxiety, she surrenders herself; and "henceforth there were no more hiatuses, no dead time, no remission." While she has, to be sure, entirely lost her freedom, O has gained the right to participate in what is described as virtually a sacramental rite.

> The word "open" and the expression "opening her legs" were, on her lover's lips, charged with such uneasiness and power that she could never hear them without experiencing a kind of internal prostration, a sacred submission, as though a god, and not he, had spoken to her.

Though she fears the whip and other cruel mistreatments before they are inflicted on her, "yet when it was over she was happy to have gone through it, happier still if it had been especially cruel and prolonged." The whipping, branding and mutilating are described (from the point of view of *her* consciousness) as ritual ordeals which test the faith of someone being initiated into an ascetic spiritual discipline. The "perfect submissiveness" that her original lover, and then Sir Stephen, demand of her seems to echo the extinction of the self explicitly required of a Jesuit novice or Zen pupil. O is "that absent-minded person who has yielded up her will in order to be totally remade," to be made fit to serve a will far more powerful and authoritative than her own.

As might be expected, the straightforwardness of the religious metaphors in *Story of O* has evoked some correspondingly straight readings of the book. The novelist Mandiargues, whose preface precedes Paulhan's in the American translation just published, doesn't hesitate to describe *Story of O* as "a mystic work," and therefore "not, strictly speaking, an erotic book." What *Story of O* depicts "is a complete spiritual transformation, what others would call an *as-*

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cesis." But the matter is not so simple. He's right to dismiss an analysis of O's state of mind in psychiatric terms that would reduce the book's subject to, say, "masochism." As Paulhan says, "the heroine's ardor" is totally inexplicable in terms of the conventional psychiatric vocabulary. The fact that the novel employs some of the conventional motifs and trappings of the theater of sadomasochism has itself to be explained. But then, Mandiargues has fallen into an error which is no less reductive and only slightly less vulgar. Surely, the only alternative to the psychiatric reductions is not the religious vocabulary. But that only these two foreshortened alternatives exist can, perhaps, be explained as yet one more echo of the bone-deep denigration of the range and seriousness of sexual experience that still rules this culture, for all its much-advertised new permissiveness.

My own view is that "Pauline Réage" wrote an erotic book. The notion implicit in *Story of O* that eros is a sacrament is not the "truth" behind the literal (erotic) sense of the book—the lascivious rites of enslavement and degradation performed upon O—but, exactly, a metaphor for it. Why say something stronger, when the statement can't really *mean* anything stronger? But despite the virtual incomprehensibility to most educated people today of the substantive experience behind religious vocabulary, there is a continuing piety toward the grandeur of emotions that went into that vocabulary. The religious imagination survives for most people as not just the primary, but virtually the only credible instance of an imagination working in a total way.

No wonder, then, that the new or radically revamped forms of the total imagination which have arisen in the past century—notably, those of the artist, the erotomane and the madman—have chronically tended to borrow from the prestige of the religious vocabulary. And total experiences, of which there are many kinds, tend again and again to be apprehended only as revivals or translations of the religious imagination. To try to make a fresh way of talking at the most serious, ardent and enthusiastic level, heading off the religious encapsulation, is one of the primary intellectual tasks of future thought. As matters stand, with everything from *Story of O* to Mao reabsorbed into the incorrigible survival of the religious impulse, all thinking and feeling gets devalued. (Hegel made perhaps the grandest attempt to create a post-religious vocabulary, out of philosophy, that would command the treasures of passion and credibility and emotive

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appropriateness that were gathered into the religious vocabulary. But his most interesting followers steadily undermined the abstract meta-religious language in which he had bequeathed his thought, and concentrated instead on the specific social and practical applications of his revolutionary form of process-thinking, historicism. Hegel's failure lies like a gigantic disturbing hulk across the intellectual landscape. And no one has been big enough, pompous enough or energetic enough since Hegel to attempt the task again.)

And so we remain, careening among our overvaried choices of kinds of total imagination, of species of total seriousness. Perhaps the deepest spiritual resonance of the career of pornography in its "modern" Western phase under consideration here (pornography in the Orient or the Moslem world being a very different set of phenomena) is this vast frustration of human passion and seriousness since the old religious imagination, and its secure monopoly on the total imagination, began in the late eighteenth century to crumble. The ludicrousness and lack of skill of most pornographic writing, films, etc., is well known to everyone who has been exposed to them. What is less often remarked about the typical products of the pornographic imagination is their pathos. Most pornography—the books discussed here cannot be excepted—points to something more general than even sexual damage. I mean the traumatic failure of modern capitalist society to provide authentic outlets for the perennial human flair for high-temperature visionary obsessions, to satisfy the appetite for exalted self-transcending modes of concentration and seriousness. The need of human beings to transcend "the personal" is no less profound than the need to be a person, an individual. But this society serves that need poorly. It provides mainly demonic vocabularies in which to situate that need and from which to initiate action and construct rites of behavior. One is offered a choice among vocabularies of thought and action which are not merely self-transcending but self-destructive.

VI

But the pornographic imagination is not just to be understood as a form of psychic absolutism—some of whose products we might be able to regard (in the role of connoisseurs, rather than clients) with more sympathy or intellectual curiosity or esthetic sophistication.

Several times before in this essay I have alluded to the possibility that the pornographic imagination says something, albeit in a

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degraded and often unrecognizable form, worth listening to. I've suggested that this spectacularly cramped form of the human imagination has, nevertheless, its peculiar access to some truth. And this truth—about sensibility, about sex, about individual personality, about despair, about limits—can be shared when it projects itself into art. (Everyone, at least in dreams, has inhabited the world of the pornographic imagination for some hours or days or even longer periods of his life; but it's the full-time residents who make the fetishes, the trophies, the art.) That something one might call the poetry of transgression is also knowledge. He who transgresses not only breaks a rule. He goes somewhere that the others are not; and he knows something the others don't know.

Pornography, considered as an artistic or art-producing form of the human imagination, is an expression of what William James called "morbid-mindedness." But James was surely right when he gave as part of the definition of morbid-mindedness that it ranged over "a wider scale of experience" than healthy-mindedness.

What can be said, though, to the many sensible and sensitive people who find depressing the fact that a whole library of pornographic reading material has been made, within the last few years, so easily available in paperback form to the very young? Probably one thing: that their apprehension is justified, but may not be in scale. I am not addressing the usual complainers, those who feel that since sex, after all, *is* dirty, so are books reveling in sex (dirty in a way that a genocide screened nightly on TV, apparently, is not). There still remains a sizeable minority of people who object to or are repelled by pornography not because they think it's dirty, but because they know how pornography can be a crutch for the psychologically deformed and a brutalization of the morally innocent. I dislike pornography for those reasons, too, and feel uncomfortable about the consequences of its increasing availability. But isn't the worry somewhat misplaced? What's really at stake? A concern about the uses of knowledge itself. There's a sense in which *all* knowledge is dangerous, the reason being that not everyone is in the same condition as knowers or potential knowers. Perhaps most people don't need "a wider scale of experience." It may be that, without subtle and extensive psychic preparation, any widening of experience and consciousness is destructive for most people. Then we must ask what justifies the reckless ulimited confidence

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we have in the present mass availability of other kinds of knowledge, in our optimistic acquiescence in the transformation of and extension of human capacities by machines. Pornography is only one item among the many dangerous commodities being circulated in this society; unattractive as it may be, it's probably one of the less lethal, the less costly to the community in terms of human suffering. Except perhaps in a small circle of writer-intellectuals in France, pornography is an inglorious and mostly despised department of the imagination. Its mean status is the very antithesis of the considerable spiritual prestige enjoyed by many items which are far more noxious.

In the last analysis, the place we assign to pornography depends on the goals we set for our own consciousness, our own experience. But the goal A subscribes to for his consciousness may *not* be one he's pleased to see B adopt, because he judges that B isn't qualified or experienced or subtle enough. And B may be dismayed and even indignant at A's adopting goals that he himself professes; when A holds them, they become presumptuous or shallow. Surely this chronic mutual suspicion of our neighbor's capacities—suggesting, in effect, a hierarchy of competence with respect to human consciousness—won't ever be settled to everyone's satisfaction. When the quality of people's consciousness varies so greatly, how could it ever be?

In an essay on the subject some years ago, Paul Goodman wrote: "The question is not *whether* pornography, but the quality of the pornography." That's exactly right. One could extend the thought a good deal further. The question is not *whether* consciousness or *whether* knowledge, but the quality of the consciousness and of the knowledge. And that invites consideration of the quality or fineness of the human subject—the most problematic standard of all. It doesn't seem inaccurate to say most people in this society who aren't actively mad are, at best, reformed or potential lunatics. But is anyone supposed to act on this knowledge, even genuinely live with it? If so many are teetering on the verge of murder, dehumanization, sexual deformity and despair, and we were to act on that thought, then censorship much more radical than the indignant critics of pornography ever envisage seems in order. For if that's the case, not only pornography but all forms of serious art and knowledge—in other words, all forms of truth—are suspect and dangerous.

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PART OF THE VIGIL

. . . shrinking to enter, did. Your heart
Was large—you'd often told me—large but light,
Ant palace, tubercular coral sponge amazed
With passages, quite weightless in your breast.
(Or did my entrance weigh? You never said.)
In sunlit outer galleries I pondered
Names, dates, political slogans, lyrics,
Football scores, obscenities too, scrawled
Everywhere dense as lace. How alike we were!
More than pleased, I penetrated further.
Strung haphazard now through the red gloom
Were little, doorless, crudely lighted chambers:
Four waxen giants at supper; the late king;
A dust-furred dog; a whore mottled with cold,
Legs in air; your motorbike; a friend,
Glass raised despite the bandage round his head,
His eyes' false shine. What had happened to them all?
Yet other cells appeared empty but lit,
Or darkly, inconceivably tenanted.
From one, a word sobbed over: 'Waste . . . the waste . . .'
Where was the terrace, the transparency
So striking far away? In my fall I struck
An iron surface (so: your heart was heavy)
Hot through clothing. Snatched myself erect.
Beneath, the gasp and wheeze of great valves. What
If all you knew of me were down there, leaking
Fluids at once abubble, pierced by fierce

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Impulsions of unfeeling, life, limb turning
To burning cubes, to devil's dice, to ash—
What if my effigy were down there? What,
Dear god, if it were not!
If it were nowhere in your heart!
Here I turned back. Of the terrors, the exhaustions
That beset me from then on I cannot speak.
Those are written where no one shall read them.
Nor was your heart so cleverly constructed
I needed more than time to get outside—
Time, scorned as I scorned the waiting daylight.
Before resuming my true size, there came
A place in which one could have scratched his name.
But what rights had I? For your image, somehow
Still unharmed, deep in my own saved skin
Blazed on. You might yet see it, see by it.
Nothing else mattered . . .

James Merrill

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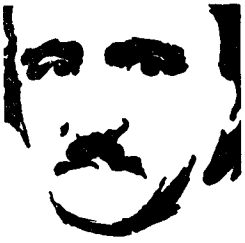

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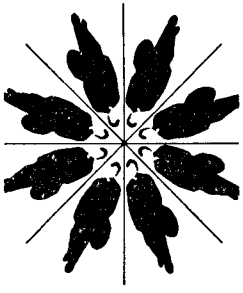

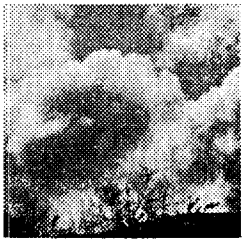

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Leo Bersani

FROM BACHELARD TO BARTHES

France, as everyone knows, is the country of fashion. Intellectual jargons and artistic personalities are picked up as passionately and dropped as ruthlessly as the perpetually daring inventions of Givenchy and Saint Laurent. There is a hallowed myth about "the French mind" which it would be useful to get rid of once and for all: the French, we have always been told, are critical and systematic. Nothing could be further from the truth. If indeed there is such a thing as a French style of thought, it could, I think, be much more accurately defined as impressionistic, theoretical, polemical and conformist. This combination of rather unattractive qualities makes some of us understandably suspicious of the intellectual revolutions which the French perennially announce. But there has, surprisingly enough, been something of a revolution in contemporary French criticism, or at least a considerable number of important works largely free of that arrogant frivolity which we recognize as the style of French cultural life.

But that style has naturally fed upon these works, and it therefore seems wise to prepare you for the discouragement you will surely feel if you decide to investigate what has recently been going on in French literary life. If, for example, you were to read the fashionable magazine *Tel Quel,* you might feel that most of the writers I will be discussing are hopelessly *démodés.* The "structuralists" quickly took over from the "thematic" critics. Georges Poulet, Jean-Pierre Richard and Jean Starobinski are, to be sure, still published and "respected" in Paris, but who would be naïve enough to think that they (or even Roland Barthes, raised in 1965 to martyrdom by Sorbonne Professor Raymond Picard's attack on his Racine book) are still "in," now that Michel Foucault has given us, with *Les Mots et les choses,* what has been called the most important work since *Being and Nothingness* or, better still, since *The Critique of Pure Reason*? But Foucault may already be last year's fare: a marvelously

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candid letter from Paris informs a friend of mine that the psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, whose nine-hundred page *Ecrits* was recently published, "est vraiment le seul génie du moment." Who can keep up with these rapid changes of fashion? They are an inevitable part of cultural impressionism, which tends to be parasitic: the French make up for the lateness of their discoveries (for example, of Freud and of the Russian formalists) by the intensity and brevity of their fervor. It seems that French publishers are now interested in translating twentieth-century American criticism, and it is not inconceivable that in 1975 the literary revolutionaries of Paris will be carrying the banner of Brooks and Warren.

While the intellectual hierarchy in Paris may vary from year to year, there is, at any one moment, almost complete unanimity of opinion and interest from the base to the peak of the pyramid of power. The sharp disagreement among American critics a couple of years ago over *Herzog* and *An American Dream* would be inconceivable among the best French critics. How thrilling and improbable it would be to find in the pages of *Tel Quel, Preuves, Critique* or *La Nouvelle revue française* what strike me as simple and self-evident truths: for example, that Lucien Goldmann has an elephantine sensibility and is theoretically uninteresting once he stops paraphrasing Georg Lukács and René Girard; that the introduction and the essays on Corneille and Racine in Starobinski's *L'Oeil vivant* are extraordinarily dull; and that Barthes, by submerging the brilliantly impressionistic social criticism of *Mythologies* in the derivative theories of his *Eléments de Sémiologie* (where Saussurian terminology adds nothing *but* terminology to analyses of road signs and menus) has himself "signified" nothing more than his own evolution toward rococo banality.

The astonishing conformity of opinion about books and ideas which you find in French magazines is of course partly explainable in historical and geographical terms. The influence of New York in American cultural life is almost negligible compared to the monolithic power of Paris. There is simply no way to resist that power, no other center of diffusion; in France, Belgium and Switzerland, the attention of Paris is the *only* sign of success. And Paris is, after all, a rather small and provincial city; it takes a depressingly short time for people to get together and decide what's good and what's bad, to create, announce and impose various trends and fashions. As in all

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cultural oligarchies, differences of opinion are only sporadically tolerated. (The philosopher Paul Ricoeur is a notable exception to the structuralist chorus; two men long established in America, Serge Doubrovsky and Paul de Man, have provided almost the only other dissenting voices.)[1] Poulet and Starobinski teach, respectively, in Zurich and in Geneva, and it's difficult to believe that they sympathize with the most recent trends in French criticism. But the brutal fact of French cultural life is that if you attack what the centralizing, devouring and manifesto-mad in-group from Paris has decided to promote, you are liable to find that your only intellectual allies are a few Sorbonne scholars and the reviewers from *Le Monde* and *Le Figaro littéraire*.

What is generally taken for the French critical spirit is a highly developed taste for attacking intellectual dwarfs. If the gods and temples of *la vie littéraire* change, the enemy is an immovable, permanently recognizable target. In structuralist terms (I'll spare you the diagrams that usually accompany structuralist analyses), it could be said that Parisian literary life is a diachronically feeble system: the opposition to what fashion excludes (the Sorbonne, the newspapers, bourgeois society) is hardly affected by the temporal changes in fashion (Richard → Barthes → Foucault). Now constant polemics against the most narrow-minded academicism is scant proof of a critical spirit. It is in fact largely gratuitous and incomprehensible except as a ritualistic act of self-congratulation. You would think from the hysterical sarcasm directed by some of the second-line new critics against the government and the press that they were being effectively persecuted, or at the very least that Frenchmen were being prevented from reading Roland Barthes and coerced into finding Pierre-Henri Simon of *Le Monde* a more exciting critic of literature. Certainly the journalistic reaction to Barthes's *On Racine* was a particularly unpleasant and even violent display of philistinism, and, as we know, official hostility toward intellectual life does not have to become real persecution in order to be felt as oppressive. But the distinction between the two, which the French prefer to ignore, is a useful one to make, if only as an aid in determining proper

1. After devoting a sympathetic issue to structuralism, Sartre's *Les Temps Modernes* has just published two negative reviews of the anti-Sartrean *Les Mots et les choses*. Until now there has been little resistance from the source which might have made resistance interesting.

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strategies of resistance. Furthermore, some of the attacks on the new critics surely express intellectual insecurity more than ideological hostility: Barthes, Blanchot and Richard are by no means always easy to read, and they are at least as much a threat to intellectual vanity as they are to bourgeois institutions. Perhaps profoundly indifferent to politics, the French (as we see in their comments on the United States) *immediately* see political intrigue everywhere; and nothing is more politically frivolous and ineffectual than the strident cry of "Right-wing plot!" at the drop of a reviewer's cliché. There can be a certain pleasure in that cry, and in Paris it is often part of a self-exciting and self-promoting game. American intellectuals, who tend, if anything, to be masochistically self-critical, would do well to remember this French aversion to self-criticism before they anxiously agree with the typically unexamined French view that America is the most conformist country in the world.

There is, happily, a much brighter side to the picture. The importance of what has been done in French criticism since the war can perhaps best be approached by a brief look at some of the assumptions it rejects. The central piety of traditional criticism is a belief in the existence of an analyzable literary object. Picard, in his anti-new-critical pamphlet, *Nouvelle critique ou nouvelle imposture,* at least has the merit of explicitly, if somewhat simplemindedly, defending this belief. We can't, he argues, say just anything about Racine's plays: "There is a truth about Racine on which we can all agree." You wonder why this exegetic Utopia had not been reached before the new critics. Never mind; the objective aspects of literature which will lead us directly to interpretive unanimity are the certainties of language, the implications of psychological coherence and the structural imperatives of the tragic genre.

I won't insist on the obviously simplistic notions of linguistic meaning and psychological coherence which are the most glaring defects of this critical credo. More interesting, as Barthes points out in his answer to Picard (*Critique et vérité*), is the question of the *kind* of interpretations sanctioned by an appeal to the supposedly objective criteria of a text's language and structure. It's a shame that Barthes didn't have a better reader of Racine to deal with. Picard's prejudices are so transparent, he is so anxious to save literature from what he fears are the incoherent obscenities of the unconscious, that he is continually closing his eyes to precisely the kind of evidence he

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accuses Barthes of neglecting. Thus, in order to preserve the hallowed notion of a "modest Aricie" in *Phèdre,* he simply ignores the accumulated brutality of eleven verses in which this sweet captive makes it abundantly clear that what draws her to Hippolyte is the prospect of making him suffer. Hippolyte is the appetizing object of attack in the play, the tender virgin whom both Phèdre and Aricie are out to rape. But for Picard, Aricie's love is simply there, an unmotivated, fleshless absolute, and if she mentions the pleasure of subduing Hippolyte, it's simply in order "to justify"(!) her feelings. In short, at its worst the religion of the literary object goes hand in hand with a shocking indifference to literary texts, and this for the obvious reason that Picard's critical objectivity only feebly conceals a view of literature as both banal and sublime, as a triumph of reason and order over a formless "source" called life.

The central issue between Picard and Barthes (which both see, but which Picard is unable to argue effectively) is the *specificity* of literary language. To what extent are its structures different from those of other organizing systems, from, say, those of dreams or of myths? Barthes doesn't deny literature's specificity, but it could be said that, like other new critics in France, he neglects formal and textual particularities in order to repostulate them within a general theory of human signs. The implications of this are more radical than it might at first seem. In what I have called the religion of the literary object, the uniqueness of literature may in fact be affirmed in order to deny it. The relation between literature and life, for many people far more perceptive than Picard about individual works, is thought of in terms of an absolute distance and, paradoxically, an identity of substance. On the one hand, the critic is not supposed to use the procedures and vocabulary of nonliterary disciplines; psychoanalysis and linguistics, for example, can't tell us anything about what is specifically "poetic" in a poem. The most interesting things we can say about literature are, in this view, inapplicable to anything outside literature. On the other hand, since literary creation obviously takes place within life, a connection has to be imagined between the two, and perhaps the only way to protect both the relevance and the remoteness of literature is to think of it as a sublimated copy of life. There is something which precedes the literary work and which the writer lifts up, transforms into what Picard calls the "superior order" of art. We end up, then, with a curious combination of ideas: the

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processes by which the writer constructs a verbal system of coherent meanings are irreducibly different from other semantic processes, but these processes have nothing to do with creating the *content* of meaning, which is given before the work is written and which the critic extracts as a "truth" about life.

The consequence of this view of literature's specificity is, as we have often seen, nothing less than the absorption of literature itself into a discussion of Life. For what can the critic actually talk about? An exaggerated respect for literature may, it seems to me, be exactly equivalent to an impulse to judge literary works on the quality of the life they presumably express. The peculiar position in which the literary work is placed by its being considered as an analyzable object about which certain very definite things can and cannot be said is one of an extraordinary devaluation (which is the hidden meaning of its sanctification) in comparison to every other activity in life. The remoteness of that "superior order" makes it particularly vulnerable to the most ruthless judgments. We are to believe that literature alone is knowable; but the distinctness of the object in literary criticism is, I suggest, an illusion created by the distance we arbitrarily put between ourselves and the work, a distance which makes it possible for us to think of our systematic interpretations of life as epistemological certainties. To put the case extremely, the discussion of literature is perhaps impossible as long as we continue to believe in the objective existence of literature. At least as far as modern literature is concerned, it's certainly no longer possible to think that we can define the particularity of literature in terms of the genres of fiction, drama or poetry; nor are most of us naïve enough to think that words in a literary work are any less ambiguous and symbolic than they are in ordinary conversation. The most intelligently stated objections to modern writing often frankly reveal what has perhaps always been behind our cherished notion of the privileged status of art: the desire to separate literature from life so that we may possess the supposed "meanings" and "values" of life in artifacts whose forms miraculously immobilize experience.

This would naturally be an unfair summary of modern American and English criticism, about which the French, as you might expect, are abysmally ignorant. The most convincing case for the existence of a discussable literary object has of course been made not in the halls of the Sorbonne, but in the studies of twentieth-century

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American critics. But the best textual critics, whatever complexities and ambiguities they may find in the literary object, have deliberately refused to locate the *subject* of a text beyond its particular verbal organizations. There is no "intention" behind an image outside the context in which it is used. The French critics' rejection of this premise accounts for what must seem to American readers like a scandalous indifference to "what the text says," by which we of course mean the immediate verbal environment. For the French the subject of a text is not the attitudes it demonstrably organizes, but rather an intentionality which contexts may obscure, or the working out of a structural coherence and intelligibility which only a kind of X ray of the text can reveal. The text is, so to speak, taken apart in order to be put together again, this time in a structure which, you might argue, is simply the critic's hypothesis. This is true, but it is beside the point: every interpretation is a hypothesis, and the structuralist hypothesis at least has the merit of being a reenactment of that meaningful intention which, more than any specific meanings, may be the subject of literature.

The results of this approach for practical criticism should be clear. A character in a play or a novel, for example, is not explained in terms of his "lifelike" richness or moral and psychological probability, but is rather understood as a functional necessity in the creation of a coherent system. Thus, Barthes's interpretations of Racine depend on a redistribution of the contexts of specific dramatic statements. The originality of his approach is, as it were, in a fidelity to the "work" achieved by a certain neglect of the "text." In any "realistic" reading of *Britannicus* and *Phèdre,* Néron and Phèdre are objectively guilty of crimes. But when their guilt is seen in relation to the Racinian heroes' abortive attempts to break away from an authority both hated and loved, it could be thought of as an alibi, as a functional necessity in order to protect the "father" from being directly accused and to allow the "son" to remain in the dubious security of the tragic enclosure. Barthes's interpretive system is, as you can see, psychoanalytic, but he seeks no *causal* explanation of Phèdre's guilt outside of its place in the structure of what he calls *homo racinianus.* His study, like Richard's reconstruction of Mallarmé (although Barthes, unlike Richard, limits himself to Racine's works), is one of those original and disconcerting "portraits" of contemporary French criticism. He neither studies the plays in detail nor is he

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describing a biographical Racine. The "man" he portrays is nothing more than a certain type of structural coherence. Racinian psychology is a by-product of the peculiarly Racinian way of creating intelligibility.

There is, then, no "life" which is given and which Racine copies and formalizes. The parallelism between literature and life is in the act of creating meanings and not in the content of meanings. The immediate and most radical consequence of this view is the breakdown of the presumed differences of function between critical language and creative language. Both the critic and the poet are engaged in the fabrication of meaning. Criticism, as Barthes writes in his essay on structuralism, has the same mimetic and reconstituting role as art; as the artist makes the structures of natural objects intelligible, so the critic, in his "imitations" of the work, makes the structures of art intelligible. Now this clearly does not mean that the critic tries to sound like the writer he is discussing; a similarity of function is not an identity of styles. The failure to make this distinction undoubtedly accounts for works of modern literature in which the treatment of boredom, for example, is naïvely executed as an effort to be boring. The refusal in modern thought to consider discursive language as a privileged instrument which excavates "truth" from reality is more important than the frequently confused ways in which this refusal has been expressed. And the French have of course not been the only ones to insist that systems of communication participate in and perhaps even create the phenomena they describe. More specifically, their simultaneous reevaluation of both literature and criticism has led to a deliberate confusion between the two, and to a body of work which has very little that is "critical" in the sense in which we have usually understood that word.

These general remarks should help to explain what may seem the most peculiar and objectionable aspects of contemporary French criticism: its neglect of the literary contexts of literary texts and its indifference to judgments of literary value. Perhaps the most important early example of this kind of criticism is the work of Gaston Bachelard. Bachelard would be rather exotic fare for Anglo-Saxon readers. I can hardly hope, in a few lines, to convince you to look into a writer who reads in order "to vibrate phenomenologically," for whom "the reading of poets is essentially reverie," and who measures a poet's success by his ability "to induce the reader into

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a state of suspended reading." "Nous lisions," Bachelard writes admiringly in *La Poétique de la rêverie,* "et voici que nous rêvons." Reverie is a kind of half-conscious state in which human projects spontaneously express themselves in images of matter; either water, fire, earth or air is the "privileged substance" for each of the four "fundamental oneiric temperaments" which Bachelard sets out to classify in several of his works. "For certain souls, water is the matter of despair." Or: ". . . All tranquillity is a dormant water. . . . In front of dormant water, the *rêveur* adheres to the world's repose." The absorption of a reverie into a material substance is a participation in the life of that substance. It is the act by which imagination *becomes* the world, breaks down the duality between the self and the universe. Literature gives to these reveries "the exuberance of forms"; it is the "emergence" of imagination, the completion of human desires. But Bachelard is interested only in the "detached images" of poetry; the formal arrangements of a whole poem or novel are an obstacle to the reader's identification with "the poetic will," with the "élan" of reverie which is the source of poetry. The poetic image should, then, be the origin of the reader's reverie about origins.

By all ordinary standards of judgments, Bachelard's taste in poetry is often execrable. It is not always "to vibrate phenomenologically" that you make your eyes hurriedly leave the lines he quotes. But of course that's not the point. Our notions of literary quality are perhaps no more invulnerable to attack than Bachelard's "judgment" of an image on the basis of its reverie-provoking potency. The crucial element in his thought is what might be called a structuralist version of the old idea of poetry's inspirational power. The power of poetry is its ability to disappear, to make us participate so completely in the structures of the creating imagination that—like the poet himself who lives the lives of the elements—we no longer *see* the poem in our identification with the act that produced it.

Bachelard is the Freud of the French new critics, in the sense that he has provided them with a vocabulary in which to describe mental reality. Much of what is bizarre in the works of Poulet, Starobinski, the early Barthes (his essay on Michelet), and especially Richard derives from Bachelardian assumptions about the imagination's fundamental themes. Richard defines thematic criticism as a "critique abyssale," a "study of hidden physical or humoral sources."

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In *Littérature et sensation,* Richard treats Flaubert's ascetic attitude toward style as an escape from the fear of being drowned in undifferentiated liquid matter. Poulet constantly invites us to think of a writer's mind crossing intervals, concentrating itself on a point, diffusing itself along the periphery of a circle. And Barthes speaks of Michelet's Anglophobia as "supported by a feeling of nausea in front of an excess and stagnancy of blood," of his Germanophilia as deriving "from his delight in a ceaselessly flowing substance, in blood-milk. . . ."

These weird categories bring us to a dilemma in the new French criticism, and to a parting of the ways among some of the men involved. Bachelard's work is both abstract and psychologically concrete: he's more interested in a typology of the imagination than in particular imaginative products, but his classifications are entirely affective in content. His work thus opens out into the two directions which Barthes distinguishes in *Critique et vérité.* On the one hand, we can undertake the science of literature, which would attempt to describe the "signifying logic" of symbolic language itself, "the empty forms which allow us to speak and to operate." On the other hand, criticism, which deals with specific meanings, is bound to describe an individual signifying logic when it treats individual writers. The new critics, as I have said, are not interested in deriving a biographical personality from a literary work; there is no pregnant subject "behind" the writer's language. But even if the critic sees his job, as Barthes puts it, as one of producing a "new flowering of the symbols" of the work itself, as one of continuing the work's metaphors, he obviously does not merely reproduce the work, and he gives a greater intelligibility to literature by the language he *adds* to it. It is in this sense that all criticism is subjective: while the critic refuses to explain the work by causes external to it, he nevertheless creates a new relationship—between the work and the interpretive system in which he himself "speaks" the work.

What language will you choose to speak? I think that the themes chosen by the French critics in order to imitate what might be called the writer's path of coherence can best be understood as an attempt to formulate an acausal psychology. Their categories are most interesting—Bachelard makes the point explicitly—as an alternative to what the French seem to dread as the deterministic implications of Freudianism. The French managed to act for a long time as if Freud and

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psychoanalysis had never happened. Their indifference or ignorance was followed by protest (Sartre and Bachelard, for example), and they seem at present to have an uneasily sympathetic and not wholly knowledgeable relation to the methods of Freudian analysis. It's true that psychoanalytic criticism, like Marxist criticism, tends ultimately to formulate the relation between a writer's work and his life or his society not as a relation of parallel structures, but rather as one of cause and effect. Thus, Charles Mauron's often impressive "psychocritical" readings of Racine's plays are weakened by an appeal to Racine's life as, finally, a sanction for those readings, while Lucien Goldmann's generally unimpressive analyses of Pascal and Racine are supported by what Barthes rightly detects as the hidden economic determinism of the so-called structuralist approach in *The Hidden God*. Both methods are imitatively defective, and it could be shown, I think, that biographical and economic hypotheses actually make *un*intelligible structures of the texts Mauron and Goldmann discuss. That is, their various local interpretations fit together coherently only if you agree that the principle of Racinian coherence is independent of (but responsible for) Racine's creation of a coherent dramatic world. And an immanent, noncausal coherence is the only criterion on which structural criticism asks to be judged. The appeal to causes makes for a missing link in the structuralist chain.

The appeal of Bachelard's categories is that they presumably account for their own nature. He himself insisted on the absolute newness of the poetic image, on poetry as "a sublimation which doesn't sublimate anything." But thematic criticism has suffered badly from a Bachelardian and, in Poulet, a spatiotemporal vocabulary. The invention of a drastically simplified psychology is hardly a satisfactory escape from psychological causality. Those "humoral sources" are, after all, metaphors which have to be treated metaphorically, and not literally, if the critic's vocabulary is to "cover" the writer's work in its entirety. Any interpretive system is legitimate, writes Barthes, if it is capable of transforming *everything* in a work according to the laws of its own logic. But everything in a work simply does not yield to a system of sensory perceptions which are not, in any writer I know of, the final term of his intelligibility. Richard, who is a brilliant critic, gets further than anyone else with this method; the man who is least well served by his language, whose extraordinary sensitivity to literature is continually thwarted by his

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rigorously adhering to categories of only limited interest, is Poulet. The image of a circle may be recurrent in literature, but no interesting literary work can be adequately discussed in terms of its metaphors of "centers" and "circumferences." And even the categories of time and space in, for example, Proust can themselves be made intelligible only if they are placed in relation to other things in the work (jealousy and snobbery, which Poulet doesn't even mention), that is, considered as metaphorical terms of a larger system in which affectivity is infinitely more than geometric.

The principal interest of Poulet's and Richard's work is as models of abstract structuralist analyses with which they probably wouldn't like to be identified. While their *découpage* into a writer's language is unable to account for all that we respond to in a literary work, it could be argued that the very nature of their critical procedures makes explicit the real subject of literature. The direction of time in art, Poulet writes, is not from past to future or from future to past, but rather "from the isolated instant to temporal continuity," from discontinuous sensations to a structural coherence among sensations. Thus time for Poulet is not a chronological sequence but, instead, a process of connecting and differentiating among different "points," that is, the process of making lines and shapes, of giving form to *space*. Poulet's and Richard's constant use of false temporal transitions is both irritating and deceptive. We are always being told how things "begin" in a writer, what his mind is doing "now," how it moves from "now" to "then" to a "final moment." But these are, of course, anything but "moments"; Poulet and Richard use metaphors of temporal progress to point to the organizational potentialities of a mass of either undifferentiated or disconnected sensations. The progress of the critical essay thus illustrates the structural logic of the work; and the work's motivation is located in the very articulation of its coherence. Implicit in Poulet and Richard is the assumption that the work has been thoroughly described once the critic's metaphor has been exhausted, for the work seeks to express nothing more than the total intelligibility which is the object of criticism.

Time is nevertheless important in Poulet in that structures, as he writes in *Le Point de départ,* are never "radically objective"; their discovery is the writer's intention, and coherence can be only a gradual process. This interest in the subjective movement *toward* structures distinguishes the earlier French critics from the more re-

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cent structuralist critics, who have become intrigued by the possibility of finding structures entirely independent of individual histories and intentions. But already in Poulet and Richard one sees the possibility of that "science of literature" which Barthes speaks of and which would make literature superfluous, or which would at least, Barthes warns, leave aside, as a "residue," "genius, art, humanity." For if the *processes* of "signification" are the subject of literature, then the specific meanings of literary works can be thought of as obscuring the laws which make them possible. Even more radically, if the conditions for creating meaning are objective and universal, then literature—indeed all human expression—is endlessly tautological. As Philippe Sollers has announced, everything that has been written "is only a particular and limited case of writing (*écriture*)."

And so we find ourselves as nostalgic for absolute certainties as poor Picard. But of course the stakes are now higher. "There is a truth about literature or, even better, about the mind," the structuralists might say, "on which we can all agree." The master discipline of the new science would be linguistics. The structuralists have enthusiastically accepted the linguists' argument that the internal structure of every type of social discourse is organized on the model of the structure of language. The specificity of literature is that of a connotative discourse; its science would be the classification of those "figures" which are, as Gérard Genette writes, "the inner space of language," or the variously shaped spaces between a sign and its meaning, between a signifier (what the poet actually says) and the thing signified (the poet's virtual language). Criticism and linguistics thus meet on the common ground of rhetoric. The interest of Barthes and Genette in the science of rhetoric is nothing less than the ambition to establish an exhaustive code of literary connotations. Thus, peculiarly enough, the object returns, this time not as the text, but as the "literary function" itself. An illusion? That remains to be seen; any thorough critique of structuralism would probably have to be made within a more general critique of scientific ambitions to describe the programming of the brain. So far, at any rate, linguistic and rhetorical analyses of literature have been disappointing. It was in fact a Belgian linguist, Nicolas Ruwet, who, in a paper read at last October's symposium at Johns Hopkins on "The Languages of Criticism and The Sciences of Man," emphasized both the gaps in current linguistic analyses of literary texts (for example, the absence

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of a general theory of contexts) and warned against the danger of overvaluing, in criticism, a structuralist approach which may be only a transitional stage in linguistics itself. The well-known analysis which Lévi-Strauss and Jacobson have done of phonemic, syntactic and rhetorical structures in Baudelaire's "Les Chats" (such criticism can naturally be written by committees) manages to be the closest reading of a poem I have ever seen, while it makes the poem entirely invisible. But the delirium of the new "science" is precisely that: the annihilation of meaning, the destruction of literature as the very condition of an attempt to explain the possibility of either.

But the sanction for such interests does, to a certain extent, come from the history of literature itself. The destruction of literary texts is not an invention of contemporary critics; from Flaubert to Beckett, almost every important modern writer has been engaged in the subversion of his own meanings, in a more or less violent refusal to believe in or be limited by the expressiveness of his language. Beginning with *Bouvard et Pécuchet,* the masterpieces of monotony in modern art could be thought of as an attempt to say nothing at all within, however, a language that would never stop. More radical than the notion of universal structures which might finally be described independently of all local contents is the notion of the absolute neutrality and formlessness of a language which could never be spoken or described, a language which is merely the endless repetition of an infinite sameness.

No one has made that language the impossible subject of his work more explicitly than Maurice Blanchot, perhaps the most extraordinary voice—absolutely clear and absolutely enigmatic, unmistakable and devoid of personality—in modern literature. "The search of literature is the search for the moment which procedes it." Where? Literally nowhere, that is, in the nature of language itself, which is not to refer to objects but to abolish them, which tempts us with the possibility of a pure and objectless designation. What Blanchot seeks to "hear" in literature is the "uninterrupted murmur" of an original, limitless, neutral language which the literary work in fact interrupts. It is, he suggests, perhaps only when literature is fragmented, discontinuous and incomplete that it can bring us back to that "pure point of the undetermined" which is its origin. By continually contesting the meanings which it cannot help but create, a work can thus evoke a kind of ideal meaninglessness, a vague and

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empty neutrality where, as Blanchot writes, being would be perpetuated as nothingness, as the absence of any *determined* being.

One feels that Blanchot is partly responsible for the vogue of deliberate obscurity among contemporary French writers. There is, it often seems, something competitively hermetic in their work: the writing in *Tel Quel* often makes Barthes seem as limpid as Voltaire, and Lacan has carried the day with a style which is, hopefully, the *ne plus ultra* of garbled impenetrability. Blanchot, however, is obscure without being difficult. There is nothing to "understand" in his work except the conditions in which understanding is irrelevant. It's nonetheless difficult to talk *about* Blanchot, which undoubtedly explains why Camus's unsuccessful attempt, in *The Stranger,* to write a book about which nothing could be said received much more attention than Blanchot's first book, *Thomas l'obscur,* published a year before Camus's novel. The "neutrality" of Camus's writing is an illusion; *The Stranger* has a philosophical and social thesis. Blanchot, on the other hand, is indifferent to negation and revolt. His work is an attempt to suggest a more "original," nondialectical mode of being. And the obscurity of his writing derives from this effort to approximate "the pure movement of dying" in literature and in being, to signify nothing more than the continual disappearing of significance.

Blanchot's enigmatic and poignant sentences seal the doom of their own meanings. His essays and récits almost *are* an uninterrupted murmur of an infinite sameness: a single Blanchot sentence contains the strategy, the model of his whole work. That obsessively repeated model is one of paradox (a silence which speaks, an interiority which is external), or rather of a juxtaposition of contradictory terms meant to affirm a reality beyond or before paradoxes and contradictions. The nonparadoxical paradox thus illustrates the extrinsic, arbitrary relation between language and meaning: language is the *possibility* of meaning, that is, the presence and absence of *all* meaning.

Blanchot's "literary criticism" has, inevitably, tended to tell us less and less about the writers he chooses to mention; what interests him in a work is how it refers to what is absent from the work. The "sympathy" between the writer and the critic is an impersonal anonymous identification. Since criticism and literature are occasions which violate the absence of occasions, ideally both would disappear in their common source. Thus, in its most extreme, most limited, and yet

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most intriguing form, modern French criticism would seem to envisage the perfectly sympathetic critical act as the consecration (and murder) of literature by an uninterrupted silence.

The perfect anonymity of the ideal critical act also makes it perfectly negligible, and in conclusion I would like to return from Blanchot's rarefied thought to the more livable achievements of recent French criticism. First of all, what disappears from criticism when it assumes a similarity of function between the critical and the creative acts, when it places itself alongside of literature rather than at a "critical" distance from it, are all judgments about the work's value. Now while I think that the refusal to judge implies a limited view of *all* meaningful activities, it is perhaps a healthy subversion of literature's falsely privileged status to assert that, in one sense, there are no bad books. More precisely, we can never judge art on the "truth" it supposedly contains; perhaps the most insidious form of censorship in criticism is an appeal to life as a sacred (and inhibiting) model for those operations by which all languages *invent* life. Any supposed statement about life is partial or distorting only in reference to other partial and distorting statements; and the interest of a language is more in its capacity for *conveying* meanings than in the hypothetical validity of the meanings it conveys. Furthermore, if the quality of life represented in a literary work is an essentially irrelevant basis of judgment, the best French critics remind us that, far from being indifferent to value, criticism in fact creates the work's value. The greatness of literature has, after all, never been anything more than an inference from the critical performances it inspires. By choosing to follow the writer's itinerary of signification, French critics have implicitly located the appeal of great literature not in the range of reality it covers or includes, but in a total intelligibility and structural coherence which allow us—and especially the critic of literature—to experience the exhilarating power of *making sense*.

But the structuralist view of meaning is, to say the least, extremely debatable. It is, I agree, important to point out that the "events" of all signifying systems are largely motivated by the patterns of intelligibility which those systems create. Form and content are not merely inseparable, as we have now been told *ad nauseam*; more exactly, form and structure can determine content, for the way in which a language is elaborated and constructed may actually establish the phenomena it describes. Thus, the determinations—and

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inspirations—of art are at least partly internal to the conditions in which art works in order to create meaning. Psychology, in literature and in life, may be a structural necessity, a function of intelligibility rather than a preexistent reality which language merely seeks to make intelligible.

But it is precisely this insight into the relation between meaning and the processes that create it which, I think, reveals the limitations of the structuralist approach. For what are the mental activities in which, so to speak, a rage for intelligibility actually creates content and determines meaning? Nothing could describe more accurately the way in which our dreams "signify." In dreams, events and people from our waking life lose their personalities in order to become pure functions. I have, in my past, created certain intelligible structures as a way of interpreting the world once and for all. And when I dream, my unconscious uses my boss to signify my mother and my brother to signify me for the sake of immobilizing my present experience in the security of those past structures. In the same way, neurotic behavior is a marvel of structural coherence: nothing that happens to the neurotic escapes the protective, deathlike order which he opposes to the structural *in*coherence of events in time. The unconscious is the original structuralist. Perhaps the greatest popular illusion about unconscious activity is that it is chaotic and incoherent; it strikes me as far more probable that its life is a tautology of beautifully and absurdly intelligible structures.

To the extent that literature, like all other human activities, expresses that unrelenting subordination of life to intelligibility which appears to characterize the unconscious, it is of course analyzable in structuralist terms. Much of the appeal of literature is undoubtedly in the almost magic spectacle it offers—and which Poulet, Richard and Barthes brilliantly reenact for us—of a mind in the process of reducing life to a purely formal expressiveness. The search for the structure of a literary work is analogous to the interpretation of dreams. What Barthes and Mauron discover is that Racine's situations (like the events of our conscious life in dreams) disguise a persistently distorting structure in which, for example, the psychological differences between Hermione, Oreste and Andromaque are less important than their place in an interpretive system where they all *function* as Pyrrhus's "father." Racine is of course the ideal subject for the structuralist demonstration: the rigid, repetitive intelligibility of Racinian violence

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is even further reinforced by some of the most fully rationalized, disciplining conventions in the history of literature.

But, as I have said, the demonstration is possible only if the literal sequences and contexts of events are ignored. And a context is precisely the opportunity to allow a particular event to subvert a structure. If we tend to spatialize the world in fixed patterns, we also adapt this tendency to innumerable occasions—in literature and in life—which we recognize as structurally unassimilable, which we can only "take in" and "attack" obliquely. That delicate adaptation defines our style, our tone and, in literature, the "voice" of a particular passage. An interest in tone, about which the French have absolutely nothing to say, is an interest in our astonishing capacity to question and be ironic about the theories and interpretations which make the world familiar to us. The French, proud of their reputation as the great nation of "style," no longer have anything to tell us about the enriching confusions which personal voice or style introduces into a structuralist system. Particular occasions, events in time, are the contents of literature, and it might almost be useful to reintroduce the notion of content in literary criticism to designate that which may indeed obscure the underlying structures, but which as a result makes a book or a life richer than the orders which it proudly but somewhat pathetically invents. Content immediately becomes a function of form only in our most frightened contacts with the world.

The best French criticism is, to be sure, a useful antidote to the naïve indifference to theory in the best Anglo-Saxon criticism. My own hesitation in this discussion between paraphrase and personal assertion undoubtedly reflects the difficulty I have found in bringing together very different critical perspectives in the writing of practical cirticism. It would, I feel, be interesting to study literature as a struggle between self-immobilizing themes and structures and the pull away from such themes toward a greater variety of response to the world and to language. But I don't see how such a struggle could ever be described in terms of an exact science, and I see even less why we should sacrifice time, particularity, content and tone in order to make such a science possible. The French seem to have taken up the banner of a very primitive rage for intelligibility. But France has always been known as the country of reason, and it is perhaps only natural that it should be the Children of Reason who illustrate its derisions and its madness.

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Ronald Tavel

KITCHENETTE

CHARACTERS IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE*

FILMMAKER	*Harvey Tavel*	JOE	*Grover Noel*
JO	*Mary Woronov*	MIKEY	*Diane Dorr-Dorynek*
MIKIE	*Eddie McCarty*		

A kitchen table downstage center; a high stool stageright side of the table; a kitchen chair upstage side of the table; a toilet commode left side of the table; a small box downstage front of the table; a chest near the right wing with dishes, a water basin, a malted machine, etc. The set is in complete disarray with ladders, flats, theater lights, etc., placed haphazardly here and there. The impression is that there has been virtually no preparation for the play about to be performed.

A FILMMAKER *carrying a script enters upstage left with* JO *who is scantily dressed in a pullover and black mesh stockings. She carries a mascara case, mirror, makeup articles, etc.*

FILMMAKER: All right, Mary, sit over there *(indicating the stool)*. Eddie, are you ready? Let's get started. It's late.

MIKIE *(off-stage)*: Coming, coming!

FILMMAKER: "Kitchenette"—take one. Roll 'em!

MIKIE *enters upstage left carrying a litter basket. He is dressed in torn undershirt, baggy trousers, very nervous, very neurotic look-*

* First performance, January 6, 1967, Play-House of the Ridiculous, New York, New York. Directed by Harvey Tavel.

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ing. He paces back and forth downstage fumbling with the basket. He throws it on the floor, seizes the edge of the table. Jo, *as if in a trance, applies her makeup.*

MIKIE *(the height of tension)*: Litter basket!

FILMMAKER *(calmly)*: No, that won't do. Take it again.

"Kitchenette"—take two.

MIKIE *picks up the basket, exits upstage left, returns immediately and repeats his performance with even greater tension and suspense.*

MIKIE: Litter basket!

FILMMAKER: Again.

MIKIE: Litter basket!

FILMMAKER: Again.

MIKIE: Litter basket!

FILMMAKER: Again. Slowly.

MIKIE: Litter basket!!!

Jo *(after very long pause)*: What did you say, darling?

MIKIE: Lit-ter bas-ket!!!

Jo: Oh.

Very long pause.

MIKIE: I said litter basket!

Jo *(long pause)*: I know, dear. You said litter basket.

MIKIE: Well, don't you care at all?

Jo *(long pause)*: Of course I care about litter baskets, dear, but what do you want me to do about them?

MIKIE *(sitting on the commode)*: Rummage around in them. . . .

Jo *(long pause)*: I do rummage around in litter baskets, dear, that's how I found you.

MIKIE *(ecstatic, rushing over to her)*: I love you, Jo.

Jo *(pause)*: That's obvious, Mikie.

MIKIE: You see, Jo, I only brought it up because people are always throwing away worthwhile things. They're always throwing worthwhile things into the litter basket.

Jo *puts down her mascara equipment, gets up and goes over to the litter basket now lying near the small box. She bends over, rear end up and toward the audience, legs perfectly straight, and begins picking objects out and examining them. She finds panties and brassieres and empty beer cans. She makes two piles on the table, one of the undergarments and one of the beer cans. She*

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bends her head toward the audience without changing her position.

Jo: You know, Mikie, you're right: half the things in this litter basket shouldn't have been thrown out.

Jo *neatly arranges the beer cans and then picks up the undergarments and throws them back into the litter basket.*

MIKIE *(tossing himself hysterically at the basket)*: My clothes!!

Jo: Hush, dear, hush. . . . It's all right.

MIKIE *(crying, working himself up from the floor onto the commode)*: They threw *me* away! They threw *me* into the litter basket. . . . and I'm a worthwhile thing.

Jo: Of course, you are, darling, of course you are. . . .

MIKIE *continues to cry like a neurotic child and* Jo *goes over to him and sits on his lap. She kisses and soothes and pets him. She puts his head against her chest; it is all very maternal. Then, slowly, very slowly, she inches away from him and squirms up onto the table, like a kitten in heat, pouting and hissing.* MIKIE *watches her with popping eyes, begins to drool.* Jo *moves her long, shapely legs temptingly before his face; he runs his hands tenderly over her shoes, mumbling* "Well hello there," *and begins to kiss the shoes. The* FILMMAKER *urges* MIKIE *on to more enthusiastic lasciviousness,* "Eat them, eat them," *etc.*

Jo *(groaning with delight, her head thrown back)*: Oh! Sail on! Sail on! Behind you leave the grey Azores, behind the gates of Hercules. . . . . .

To the FILMMAKER.

Leave him alone, Harvey, he's doing fine!

MIKIE *moves his lips around her ankles, then quickly starts kissing along her calves to her knees. Suddenly, she catches his neck sharply between her thighs.*

Jo *(disgusted)*: OK, Columbus, you've discovered enough!

Jo *jumps off the table and resumes her seat on the stool. She continues applying makeup.* MIKIE, *left on the commode, makes discreet movements and readjustments to indicate that he is employing the facility.*

FILMMAKER: Comfy?

MIKIE *(softly)*: More or less. . . .

Very long pause.

MIKIE: This afternoon I went to a shower, Jo.

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Jo *(long pause)*: What did you say, dear?
MIKIE: I said I went to a shower this afternoon, Jo.
Jo *(long pause)*: Oh, how nice.
MIKIE: Yes, it was nice.
Jo *(long pause)*: What happened at the shower, dear?
MIKIE: I had sex with someone in the shower.
Jo *(long pause, abstractly)*: With the water running?
MIKIE: Yes, with the water running.
Jo *(long pause)*: Oh, how nice.
MIKIE: Yes, it was nice, Jo.
Jo *(long pause)*: Whom did you have sex with in the shower, dear?
MIKIE: With Joe.
Jo: Joe? Which Joe?
MIKIE: The other Joe.
Jo *(long pause)*: Oh. How nice.
MIKIE: Yes, it was nice.

Very long pause.

Jo: Did you scrub each other's backs?
MIKIE: No, we just massaged.
Jo *(long pause)*: Each other's backs?
MIKIE: No, each other's fronts.
Jo *(long pause)*: Oh, how nice.
MIKIE *(quickly)*: Yes, it was nice. We massaged and massaged and massaged each other's fronts!

Growing very excited, jumping off the commode and rushing over to the FILMMAKER, *attempting to massage him while speaking very rapidly.*

You know, Harvey, massaging is a system of remedial treatment consisting of kneading and kneading and rubbing and rubbing and pressing and pinching and pressing and pulling and pushing and mushing and squeezing the other person's body!!!

FILMMAKER *(tickled, indulging him)*: Oh, stop it, Eddie, and get back on your bowl.

MIKIE *obeys; long pause.*

Jo: Oh, how nice.
MIKIE *(ferociously)*: Yes, it *is* nice! Would you like me to massage you?
Jo: What did you say, dear?
MIKIE: I said would you like me to massage you?

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Jo *(abstractly)*: Well, just my medulla oblongata, Mikie.

Mikie *(jumping over the table top to reach her)*: OK, just your medulla oblongata.

Massaging her neck while she calmly applies makeup.

How tender your medulla oblongata is, Jo.

Jo: How tender your finger tips are, Mikie.

Mikie: How tender is your skin.

Jo: How tender is the night.

Mikie: How tender is your loin.

Jo: How tender is your limpo.

Mikie: How tender is your foot.

Jo *(disgusted)*: Oh, shut up!

Mikie *(temporarily insane, choking her)*: Don't tell me to shut up, Jo, don't ever tell me to shut up, Jo!!!

Jo: OK Nero, you've strangled enough!

Mikie *(on his knees)*: Forgive, forgive me, oh my mother!

Jo *(readjusting her hair)*: Oh, I don't mind being strangled, it's just that you'll ruin my Man-Tan application.

Mikie: I'll make it up to you, Jo: we'll go to the beach tomorrow.

Jo: Besides, you'll give me a complex about chokers.

The Filmmaker *notices that* Jo *has no choker. He leaves the stage in search of one and returns a minute or two later with a long cord which he tosses on the table, mumbling,* "Here, Mary." Jo *plays with the cord from time to time, using it as a ribbon with which to bind her hair. The conversation continues oblivious of the* Filmmaker's *movements.*

Mikie: Jo, let's go to the beach tonight!

Jo: Tonight?

Mikie: Yes, yes, tonight, because when it's dark and there's no one around — then — then — we can, we can. . . . . .

Jo *(standing, brushing off her pullover)*: Oh, don't be silly, Mikie, you know how the sand hurts.

Mikie: Well, what were you planning to do tonight?

Jo *(reaching the table's left side)*: Oh, I thought we'd spend the night here, here in the kitchenette.

Very sexy.

Just the two of us, here alone together —— in the kitchenette. . . .

Mikie *(drooling, bending over the table)*: How oral!

Jo *(bending over the table to meet him)*: How moral.

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MIKIE: How formal.

JO: How normal.

MIKIE: How rural.

JO: How un-en-dur-able!! Besides, we can't go out tonight, I have nothing to wear.

MIKIE *(broad advertising voice and gestures)*: But any outfit will do. You don't have to wear something expensive.

JO *(a model's stroll across stage)*: Oh, I never wear anything expensive. I feel one should dress inexpensively — but flashily — you understand?

MIKIE *(rushing to her)*: I understand only that you're beautiful, Jo.

JO: That's obvious, Mikie.

MIKIE *(taking her in his arms)*: I'd like to change your mind about going to the beach tonight. . . .

JO *(her features distorting hideously)*: You'll have to change my face first.

Change a fool against his will,
He's of the same opinion still.

MIKIE *(tenderly)*: You're such a jokable, chokable female.

JO: Mikie, Mikie, does my humor overwhelm you?

MIKIE *(pulling out of her arms)*: It whelms me.

JO: It whelms you? What does that mean?

MIKIE: Well, it whelms me, it whelms me, it doesn't *over*whelm me.

JO *(stepping back onto the commode, crying, while* MIKIE *grimaces deliciously to the audience)*: Oh, Mikie, Mikie, what are you saying?! Then I've really failed you haven't I? As a lover and mother I've failed you! In the end, I've failed you!

MIKIE *(winking)*: No, in the *end* you haven't failed me.

JO *(screaming)*: Don't you dare wink at your mother in that disrespectful manner! Where do you think you are? With your friends? With your bummy friends?

MIKIE *(triumphant)*: Well, I always said you can choose your friends, but you can't choose your relations.

JO *(pitiful)*: Mikie, Mikie, what are you saying? Didn't you choose me for relations? Didn't you? It was free choice, wasn't it — I mean, I never forced myself upon you, did I?

MIKIE *(tenderly)*: On the contrary.

JO: And isn't a mother a boy's best friend?

MIKIE *(at the table)*: Sure, she is. Sure, she is.

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Jo *(screaming, menacing)*: Then what the hell are you complaining about, you ungrateful bastard???!!!

MIKIE *(cowering, on his knees)*: I'm not complaining, I'm just depressed, that's all. . . .

Jo: Shall I get your father's claw and scratch that depression out of you?

MIKIE: No, Jo, please, please don't scratch me!!

Jo *(opening the commode and removing a long-nailed claw from it)*: Over my knee I tell you, over Mama's knee. . . .

MIKIE *scurries under the table and up over* Jo*'s knees.* Jo, *seated on the commode, applies the claw to* MIKIE*'s rear and thighs. The* FILMMAKER *urges her on.* MIKIE *groans with sensual delight. Finally, he spills over onto the floor; both are exhausted, satisfied. She eyes him with vixen mockery.*

Jo: Now go and do your lessons and see that you behave yourself, you bad boy.

MIKIE *crawls around the table to the upstage chair.*

The other seat, stupid. . . .

MIKIE *moves to the stool, runs a pencil down a page. He sucks his thumb and begins singing. As he sings, he slips from the stool, squirms out from under the table and nearly reaches* Jo*'s shoes. Both are in the throes of poetical sensuality.*

MIKIE *(singing)*:

Wary of worrisome worrying weariors,
Pretending progenitors and superiors,
Pretentious idiotic inferiors,
Ample hips and expansive posteriors
Guard the corridor-like interiors.

Jo: How beautiful are thy poems without rhyme!

MIKIE: How beautiful are thy shoes without feet.

Jo: Mikie, Mikie, kiss my shoes without feet. . .

He starts to obey but she switches attitude, jumps up.

No, no, don't bother, not now. We did that before. And besides, it bores me; I know, I'll spray my shoes instead.

She sprays polish on her shoes without removing them.

MIKIE *(enthralled)*: Only Cinderella had so small a foot.

Jo *(unromantically)*: But my foot is not small. As a matter of fact it's too large for these shoes.

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MIKIE *(bewitched)*: No, the shoe is too small for your less smaller feet.

Advertising voice.

You can enlarge the shoe by placing it under hot water.

JO: Really, Mikie! I'll do just that right now.

She goes to the chest, lifts her foot and places it into the basin, a contorted, erotic position.

Oooooooooooooo! . . . . . that feels so so nice!

Ooooooooooooooooooo. . . . . weeeeeeeeeeee! —Mikie!

MIKIE *(rummaging through the basket)*: Yes, Jo?

JO: Was it like this when you were taking the shower?

MIKIE: I don't know. How can I tell?

JO: Well, you had sex in the shower didn't you? You had sex with Joe in the shower.

MIKIE: Yes, Jo, I did.

JO: Well, this is just like having sex in the shower. It's just like having sex in the shower with Joe.

MIKIE: Oh.

JO: Yes.

MIKIE: How nice.

JO: Yes, it is nice.

Tossing the basin away, into the audience.

But it's also boring.

MIKIE *(frigging his thumb)*: It's all, all so boring, boring. . . .

Picking the panties, slips, brassieres, etc., from the litter basket, suddenly screaming.

Why did you throw my undergarments away, Jo???!!!

JO *(drying her shoe with a towel)*: What did you say, dear?

MIKIE *(screaming again)*: I said why did you throw my undergarments away, Jo???!!!

JO: You'll have to speak more softly, darling, you know I can't understand you when you shout.

MIKIE *(attempting to control himself, showing great strain)*: Jo, Jo love, whatever possessed you to throw my — MY UNDERGARMENTS into the litter basket?

JO: They were mildewed, dear.

MIKIE: Mildewed?

JO: Yes, dear, they were mildewed.

MIKIE: What does that mean?

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Jo: Well, it's a euphemism. Actually, they had dew —— the panties had dew stains, dear.

She drops her towel; he simultaneously drops the garment.

MIKIE: Oh, well, I've never looked as good with clothes on as without them — so what's the use of trying.

Jo: Oh, don't be so insecure, Mikie. You could look splendid with the right clothes; *those* clothes just aren't you.

MIKIE: Think so?

Jo *(advertising voice)*: Of course, you just don't know how to shop. Tomorrow we'll go shopping together, we'll get you some nice outfits. We'll start at The Miracle on 57th Street—The House of Second Hand Furs.

MIKIE: Do you think so?

Jo: Certainly, I know so, Mikie; some of their furs are in such good condition only the label betrays their former owner.

MIKIE: I'd love to shop at The House of Second Hand Furs.

Jo *(sour)*: Would you, love?

MIKIE: Oh, yes, I would. Only one thing bothers me.

Jo *(shouting, very tough)*: Don't let anything bother you, Mikie!!

MIKIE: But one thing does: when you wear hand-me-downs somehow you're not yourself completely. I mean you take on something of the former owner's — personality. Because, I mean, clothes are personality and furs are hair — do you understand? So I have someone else's pubic hair wrapped around my shoulders. And then there are those foxes, the whole animal, and you become a dame destined to have a *whole* fox wrapped around your neck, including the fox hole, and all. A foxy dame. Fox. Lox. Shocks. And so on. You understand? Now if and when I go shopping and buy me hand-me-downs I try to figure out who the former owner was and if he had a personality similar to mine. That way my own personality doesn't alter that much by wearing his clothes, you understand, Jo? And that way I can still understand my own personality but also get to understand a little of his personality, or if they are the same I can understand his personality and so get to understand my own. But if I can't understand my own personality at least I can get to understand his personality by wearing his clothes. I always said, if you can't understand yourself, you might as well understand someone else. Because somehow someone else, all the other someone elses in the world, when you put together all the someone

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elses in the world, then you actually, you see, *(etc., etc., etc., etc., etc., ...).*

Jo *has been applying makeup during the speech and at this point is instructed by the* Filmmaker *to turn on the malted milk machine. While the machine grinds away,* Mikie *begins his speech all over again and then rambles on and on, becoming more and more neurotic as he gets less and less attention. His appeals to the* Filmmaker *terminate in his being forcefully led to the rear of the stage to continue his complaint there. He talks to the walls, into the wings, mounts the ladder where he carries on a two-part conversation with himself, spies on the neighbors' open bedroom window, bemoans his acrophobia, etc. He descends, peeks into the commode* — "My God! — she has no clothes on!", *and finally sinks, completely exhausted, onto the open commode.*

Filmmaker: OK, Mary, you can turn off the machine.

Jo *(obeying the order)*: Thank God that awful noise is over!

Very long pause.

I just can't stand the sound of that awful machine. It drowns out what a person is saying. I mean, you just can't hear yourself think when that machine is grinding away.

Long pause.

Mikie, did you hear what I said?

Mikie: What, dear?

Jo: I said did you hear what I said?

Mikie: Yes, Jo. You said you can't hear what you're saying.

Jo: No, I said you can't hear what I'm saying. I said I can't hear what I'm thinking.

Mikie: Oh? Are you thinking?

Jo: No, believe it or not, I am!

Joe, *attired in beach-wear, enters running and screaming upstage left. He carries a mattress on his head.*

Joe: Good friends should lie together!

Jo: We always do, dear! — Joe, how are you? Do put your mattress down and make yourself comfortable.

Joe: I think I will. Heavens, but business was bad today!

Joe *drops the mattress on the floor, revealing* Mikey, *a blonde wearing a long fur coat, standing behind him.*

Mikie: Mikey, love, how are you?

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MIKEY: How's yourself, Mikie? How are you, Jo?

MIKIE: Do put yourself down, Mikey, and I'll make you — I mean — and make yourself comfortable.

He ushers MIKEY *to the box downstage.*

Jo *(jealous)*: She doesn't have to make herself too comfortable. She isn't staying long.

MIKIE: Then neither am I.

Jo *(quick switch, very eagerly)*: Oh, could I fix you two some coffee?

JOE *(standing on the upstage chair)*: Oh, I thought you'd never ask!

Jo *(patting* JOE*'s crotch)*: Coming up! Yes . . . coming up. . . .

MIKIE: What kind of business did you say you were in, Joe?

JOE: In the mattress business, of course, can't you see?

MIKIE: Oh, of course.

JOE: Yes, and is business bad these days! Up and down Gren Ave, up and down, I tell you, and not a single comer!

Jo *(preparing coffee at the chest)*: Coming up. . . .

JOE *(indignant)*: The other side of the street, Madame!

MIKEY *(dumbly)*: Joe is so enterprising.

JOE: As I was saying, the mattress business is not lucrative. But it does have its little compensations. Like, for instance, the people you meet.

MIKEY *(on the box, facing the audience)*: Oh, Joe, tell Jo and Mikie about the kind of people you meet.

JOE: Silence!!

MIKIE: Yes, do tell us Joe.

JOE *(standing on the table top, needing no encouragement)*: Well, the other day I met this Turkish dancing girl on the street: and she did the dance of the seven veils right on the street! Only she reduced the dance of the seven veils to two veils, just two veils.

Belly-dancing, placing a veil in his belt, and a second one over his face.

One of them she took off right away. . . . . .

Discarding the veil hooked on his belt.

The other she never took off. . . .

Jo: How do you like your coffee, Joe?

JOE: I like my coffee like I like my men: — hot, sweet, and black!

MIKIE *(shocked, insane)*: BLACK??? You really like them black?

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JOE: Oh, well — black, white, yellow or red — they all have one little brown spot — and that's all that interests me!

MIKEY: You see, Mikie, Joe doesn't waste any time, he gets right down to the heart of the matter. That's why he's such a good business man.

JO: Yes, Joe is coming up in the world.

MIKIE *(annoyed)*: Are those coffees coming up?

JOE: My last meal is coming up.

MIKIE: So you go in for exotic types?

JOE *(downstage, into a spotlight)*: Well, I go down for exotic types. Like Mexicans, for example. I just love those Mexican peasants in their full white costumes — you know the kind I mean, Harvey — the ones all in white, like they just got thrown out of a pajama party or something.

JO: Joe darling, I don't believe a word you're saying.

JOE: That's always the trouble, Jo darling, I don't have time — I just don't have time to be believed.

MIKIE *(on* MIKEY*'s lap)*: I hope you enjoy your coffee, Mikey.

MIKEY *(stupidly)*: I hope you enjoy yours, too, Mikie.

JO *brings the coffees to the table and manages to spill a cupful of the liquid onto* MIKIE *and* MIKEY. JOE *leaps off the stage.*

JOE: Calamité! Au secours!! Catastrophe! Scalding crotch!!!

JO: Oh, Mikie, I'm sorry, I'm dreadfully sorry!

JOE *(leaping back up on the stage)*: Scalding crotch! Oh, your poor yummy-yummy!! *(etc., etc.)*.

JO *(shouting above the din)*: Could I get everybody some layer cake?

JOE *(startled)*: I beg your par-doon?!

JO: I said some layer cake.

JOE: That's exactly what I thought you said, my dear. Come on, everybody, let's get some layer cake!

There is a frantic scramble for position as JO *exits upstage left;* MIKIE *sits on the commode,* JOE *on the upstage chair,* MIKEY *on the downstage box. Long, uncomfortable silence. Fidgeting.*

JOE *(to* MIKIE*, mumbling)*: Can't you afford a better place?

JO *(reentering with an enormous four-tier layer cake, annoyed in the extreme)*: Horn and Hard-on! — the only thing automatic about them is their monthly rise in prices!

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Holding out the cake, moving slowly to the right side of the table, morbidly.

My life is just like that layer cake. Year after year, one year piled on top of the other, layer after meaningless layer.

JOE *(weeping, tying the veil around his head like a kerchief)*: Don't cry, dear, that's the story of my life too. One meaningless layer after another. . . .

Peeling off the complete top layer of the cake and shoving it savagely in JO*'s face.*

Here, dear, cheer up: — have a layer!!!

Peeling off the remaining layers and dealing them out to MIKIE, MIKEY *and himself.*

Have a layer! Have a layer! Have a layer!

Coming downstage, chewing the cake, vamping the audience.

There is just something soooooo Elysian about everybody having his own layer. . . .

JO *(furious, tossing the tray at* JOE*)*: But that's just it! that's just it! — I don't have a layer of my own! I never had a layer all my own!

She rushes hysterically to stage right, the others leaping frantically after her.

MIKIE: Mother, mother, please forgive me!

JO *(high drama, inconsolable)*: No — No! don't say a word. Not a word!

MIKIE: Oh, Jo, you're so beautiful now — now, with tears in your hair.

JOE: It's that new spray-net she's using.

MIKIE: You know, Jo, you're really a very attractive girl.

JO: Attractive? — A two-headed girl is attractive!!

She tosses the trio back across the stage; MIKIE *and* MIKEY *embrace madly;* JOE *lands on the commode.*

JOE: Well your two heads are attractive, my dear.

JO *(rushing to* JOE *in an absolute rage, pulling him from the commode and tossing him to the floor)*: What did you say? What did you say? What did you say?

JOE *(attempting to ward her off)*: What did I say when?

JO: Just now! Just now!

JOE: Er – er – er – er!

JO: I'll bet the answer is just on the tip of your tongue!

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JOE *(extending a long wet tongue, his eyes crossing as he looks down at the tip of it)*: No, it ain't there, neither!

JO *(coming away angrily and screaming at* MIKEY *while* JOE *squirms sensuously along the footlights, vamping the audience like a sarong girl)*: Do you dig sleeping with cripples???

MIKEY: What did you say, honey?

JO *(screaming)*: I said do you dig sleeping with cripples?

MIKEY: What did she say, Mikie?

JO: Oh! You must! Because he's cripple-minded! Cripple-minded, that's what he is!!

Crying in earnest, sitting on the commode.

MIKIE *(going to* JO *and putting her head in his lap as if she were his daughter)*: There, there, little girl, my little girl, don't you cry. . . . . don't you bother your little head about what he says. . . . . don't you bother both your little heads about what he says. . . . .

JO *(simpering)*: If you really love me, Mikie, you'll say something mean to Joe like he said to me.

MIKIE *(stalking the recumbent* JOE*)*: Hey, Joe, how would you like to eat my sausage *(pronounced: saw-sâgé)*???

JOE *(exotic accent)*: Why do you call eet your saw-sâgé —— is eet because eet is so hot?

JO: You know, I saw him in another movie — only he was called Madame Maria Ouspensakya in that movie.

JOE: Well, I always live my parts, my dear.

JO: I always live my parts, too. Only I can't figure out what my part in this movie is.

FILMMAKER: That's funny 'cause I can see it from here. — CUT!

All four break and scramble for sitting positions: JO *on the stool,* MIKEY *on the box,* JOE *on the commode,* MIKIE *on the upstage chair. A very long, tense pause; sense of expectancy.*

JO *(suddenly kicking* MIKEY *in the back)*: Hey, honey, what did you say your name was?

MIKEY: Mikey.

JO: Well, you see, that mixes me up, because his name is Mikie also.

MIKEY: Then you can call me by my second name. You can call me Miss Crocus.

JO: Miss Croak-us??

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JOE: Miss Croak-ass.

MIKIE *(rising behind* JOE, *completely insane)*: What did you say?

JOE: Miss Croak-ass!

Repeat "What did you say?" *and* "Miss Croak-ass" *a dozen times, faster and faster until it reaches a frienzied pitch; then:*

JOE: I said you can call me Miss — er — Mr. Croak-ass.

MIKIE: Oh. How nice.

JO: Yes, it is nice.

MIKEY: Yes, we're both nice. All four of us are nice.

JOE *(pulling a rose from* MIKEY*'s hair)*: All this talk of crocuses reminds me of roses.

MIKIE *(exotic accent)*: How do crocuses remind you of roses?

JOE *(throwing the rose into* MIKIE*'s coffee cup)*: Float roses in a dish for a party effect.

MIKIE *(standing furiously, grabbing* JOE*'s hair)*: What the hell did you do that for?

JOE: For a party effect, for a party effect! Julia Childs says float roses in a dish for a party effect! Don't get so upset! For goodness sake — all these excitable people——

Standing, whimpering toward the FILMMAKER.

Harvey, I'm never gonna be in a movie again where there are so many excitable people. . . .

MIKEY *stands suddenly and throws on her fur coat. She steps down off the stage and runs out into the audience, loudly complaining. A spotlight follows her to the back of the house.*

MIKEY: Excitable people! Excitable people! That's what's wrong with this world. A girl like you — you're supposed to be studying journalism, aren't you? Well, aren't you? So what are you doing going around with a bum like that? No wonder girls like you get raped! Standing around in dark doorways and kissing and mushing and he squeezes your titties — he squeezes your titties in dark doorways! — well, doesn't he? And what else does he do to you in the dirty hallways — dirty things, dirty things, doesn't he? Well, never mind what dirty things — you know what dirty things, I don't have to list them for you, he does dirty things between your legs! Your legs! YOUR LEGS! That dirty bum does dirty things between your legs so it's no wonder, I say, that girls like you get raped! You ask for it! Can't you go and sit on a bench in the park with your date? What do you have to stand up for? Now,

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look, all right, some rapes happen in the subway — I mean people like me go to work every day, we're respectable, we take the subway to work and sometimes there's a rape in the subway. Now, that can't be helped. I mean if I get raped late at night in the subway, or if it's early in the morning and I get raped in the subway, well, now, that can't be helped, can it? But a young girl like you — you're supposed to be smart, right? You're supposed to be studying journalism, right? So what are you going around with a bum like this for??

The FILMMAKER *pulls her back up on stage.*

They ask for it, Harvey, I tell you they just ask for it!!

JO: Will someone turn on the malted milk machine?

JOE: What the hell is she talking about? Harvey, she must have wandered onto the wrong set.

MIKIE: Hey, lady, go where you belong!

JOE: The other side of the street, Madame!

JO: She's just a raving maniac. I never listen to other women, anyhow.

FILMMAKER: I wonder why.

JO: You would.

JOE: She must be in that other movie, you know, playing opposite whachamacallit who's in love with that Negress — whasername — Dietrich? — with the greygreen eyes. Yeah, Harvey, he flops in love with Negr——

MIKIE: Joe, Jo and I were planning to go to the beach tonight.

JOE *(singing, dancing)*:

Under the boardwalk
We'll be having some fun,
Under the boardwalk,
In the noonday sun—
Under the boardwalk,
Under the boardwalk — Woooo!

MIKIE: You want to go to the beach with us?

JOE: Well, what are the sexual aspects?

MIKIE: I beg your pardon, I hardly know you!

JOE: I mean what are the sexual prospects?

JO *(vamping* JOE*)*: Good friends should lie together.

JOE: Stop stealing my lines, Mary, get your own writer.

JO *(very sexy)*: Hey, Joe, wanna spend ten bucks?

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JOE: The other side of the street. Madame!!!

MIKIE: Well, I said it once and I'll say it again: Good friends should lie together.

JOE *(fiercely masculine)*: I agree, sonny boy, you're perfectly right! — Here, lemme show you!

JOE *pushes everything off the table: cups and saucers, beer cans, etc., all go clattering onto the floor. Then he picks up the mattress and places it on top of the table. He grabs* MIKIE *and pushes him on the mattress and leaps on top of him.*

JOE: Mikey, Mikey, I just flopped in love with you!

MIKIE: Hey, let me up, will you? I ain't Mikey, I'm Mikie!

JOE: That's what I said: Mikey, I love you.

He pushes MIKIE *face down on the mattress.*

MIKEY *(jumping about in confusion)*: He's not Mikey, I'm Mikey!

JOE: Well, why the hell does everybody around here have the same name? How am I supposed to know who to have sex with?

JO: You have sex with more than a name, don't you?

JOE *(the height of innocence)*: What do you mean?

FILMMAKER: Dear.

JOE: Dear.

JO: Oh, you just seem to have sex with everyone!

JOE: Not *every*one, my dear — but *any*one!

Resuming his activity with gusto.

MIKIE: Let me up, will you?

JO: Coming up.

MIKIE *(pushing himself and* JOE *off the mattress)*: I'm not coming at all!

JO: Oh, yeah? — well you look it!

A dramatic freeze with all four tensed around the table. JO *is to the right of the table, the others to the left.*

JO *(breaking the freeze)*: I know: I'll toast marshmallows! Toasted marshmallows for everybody!

MIKEY *removes marshmallows from her V-neck and hands them to* JOE *who eats one and throws others into the audience.*

JOE: Yum-yum, toasted marshmallows — it's just like eating titties. . . . Here, Harvey, you have one too.

JO *spears a marshmallow with a fork, then eats it slowly, viciously, staring with triumph at* MIKIE. MIKIE *slowly moves around the table toward her, stalking her as it were.* JO *and* MIKIE

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watch him with apprehension. Suddenly JO *stabs* MIKIE *with the fork.* MIKIE *allows the fork to rest in his flesh for a long moment, then pulls it out and slams it against the wall.* MIKIE, MIKEY *and* JOE *break into a high, eerie soprano sound and gather about* JO*: they lift her up and place her on the mattress, head downstage.* MIKIE *begins to garrote* JO *with the long cord she has played with throughout the abruptions. The eerie soprano shrill ends suddenly.*

JOE *(astonished)*: Hey, what does he think he's doing — that's his mother, ain't it?

Moving forward to get a better look.

Will you dig that? — Matricide on a mattress!

MIKEY *(crying bitterly)*: He went through with it!

JOE *(coming down to the footlights and repeating the phrase in as many intonations as possible while the stage lights slowly dim)*:

Matricide on a mattress!
Matricide on a mattress!
Matricide on a mattress!
Matricide on a mattress!

Etc., etc., etc.

CURTAIN

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COMMENTS ON "WHAT'S HAPPENING TO AMERICA"

Conor Cruise O'Brien

We're sorry we have space only for some of the comments we've received on "What's Happening to America?" (PR, *Winter 1967*). *Also, we're able to print only excerpts from some of them. (It should now be clear from the variety of opinions, both in this issue and the last, that all of the contributions could not possible reflect the editors' views.)*

5. Trotsky, in the twenties, "predicted emphatically the emergence of the United States as the leading world power bound to involve itself in the affairs of all continents and to spread out its networks of military and naval bases over all oceans" (Deutscher, *The Prophet Unarmed*). Whether or not we accept the reasoning behind Trotsky's "bound to"—the view that "the urge for expansion was inherent in its [America's] own economy"—we must accept the fact that the prophecy itself was amply fulfilled. We must accept also that some kind of involvement in the affairs of all continents is likely to continue. But the forms of the involvement can change, and some forms are less dangerous than others. The key question is whether it is in America's national interest to intervene with her own military forces to stop take-overs by *native* communists—as distinct from Russian or Chinese incursions—in cases where America has failed to prevent such take-overs through diplomatic, financial and intelligence pressures? There is an "anti-communist-but-liberal" position which likes to suggest that such cases never arise; the communists are always aggressing, directly or in-

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directly, from over the border, and all that is necessary is to help the brave and staunchly anti-communist people of wherever-it-is to defend themselves against these evil and alien incursions. Thus, Diana Trilling in reply to your questionnaire thinks "that there were other better ways to help the South Vietnamese resist communist aggression—with money, technical assistance, arms—without our proclaiming ourselves, as we have, the far-reaching nation of the sword, and without this overt control of a regime of our choice." But the point is that many of "the South Vietnamese" did not wish to resist what Mrs. Trilling calls "Communist aggression"; many of them were in fact willing to fight side by side with Communists, and under Communist leadership, against those whom Mrs. Trilling thinks of as being *the* South Vietnamese, who were indeed most liberally supplied by the American authorities with those "better ways . . . money, technical assistance, arms," on which she thinks it sufficient to rely. The American authorities on the spot, however, came to a different conclusion, viz. that *their* South Vietnamese, although so aided, were losing and would have to be stiffened by American troops. There followed the steady rise in the American and allied forces committed, combined with the North Vietnamese involvement on the other side. It remains true that the only non-Vietnamese fighting in Vietnam are the Americans and their allies, and that they are doing so because, left to itself, Vietnam would quickly become reunited under a Communist form of Government. The American authorities would no doubt, like Mrs. Trilling, have preferred—as they do elsewhere—a covert to an overt control. But the problem was that here covert control and "the better ways" were not enough. If indeed it was unthinkable that "Vietnam should go Communist," then American military force and overt control had to be applied. And if the same problem arises in other areas, the same solution follows, on the same principle.

But why should it be unthinkable? On moral grounds? Is Saigon morally superior to Hanoi, the regime of Marshal Ky to that of Ho Chi Minh? Most reports suggest the contrary. Or on political grounds —that a Communist victory would bring an extension of the power of China? But there is no serious evidence to suggest that it would. Those who are now most sure that the victory of the NLF would extend the power of China were equally sure that the Chinese Revolution would extend the power of Russia. In *The China Story*—which ran through four editions in 1951—Freda Utley wrote:

> Through his trusted henchman, Marshal Malinovsky, Stalin appointed Lin Piao as commander of the Chinese Communist armies which were equipped and trained by Russia. Once as-

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> sured that a man completely loyal to Moscow was in command of the crack Chinese Communist forces, Stalin no longer had any need to worry about the possibility of Mao Tse-tung, or Chuh Teh, emulating either Chiang Kai-chek in 1927, or Marshal Tito today. The proof that Mao Tse-tung, and the other former leaders of Communist China are today prisoners, or stooges, of the Kremlin, is afforded by the February 14, 1950, treaty between Communist China and Moscow.

In fact, except partly in the somewhat farcical case of Albania's devotion to China, there is no example of a country in which *indigenous* Communist forces won power, and then put their country under the control of another Communist country.

America's foreign policy, if it continues to be predicated on the necessity of "preventing the spread of communism," by all means including the use of armed force, is likely to lead to the permanent policing by America of ever wider areas in the poor world. On the other hand, it is not clear in what way American national interests would be endangered if the view were accepted that it is up to governments of poor and weak states to behave toward their own peoples in such a way that a native communist movement does not become a danger, and that if it should become a danger, the United States will not bail them out, or prop them up with its own forces. Such governments, receiving aid, would then have a built-in incentive to use such aid for the benefit of the people, instead of stealing it, as they often do at present. It is not, I think, naïve to believe that the emphasis of U.S. foreign policy could shift in this direction. The lessons of the Vietnam involvement tend, if rightly understood, that way and—unlike some of your correspondents—I don't believe that the peace movement's educational efforts have been wholly futile. But it is important to get people to understand that the logic of "containing Communism"—as distinct from preventing the territorial expansion of Russia or China—is a logic of imperialism, and that if America is to avoid an imperialist destiny it must avoid anti-communist interventions in other people's countries. A good beginning in that direction would be to draw the line at *military* intervention and to do so not only by the verbal pledge of the U.N. Charter, but also in practice. One of your correspondents, H. Stuart Hughes, refers to a belief that leadership of the world "by right of both power and virtue" belongs to the United States. Perhaps. The United States is at present the most powerful nation certainly, while in respect of virtue international competition has never been intense; the United States has as good a right to claim the prize as anyone else. There is also a sense in which the richest nation can afford the most virtue—as journalists reserve the term "philanthropist" for millionaires

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who give away some of their money. To the outside world, however, America's virtue will be evident, only in proportion as its use of power is restrained. In Vietnam the actions of the United States give about the same impression of virtue as did those of the Soviet Union in Hungary in 1956. Apologists for the Soviet Union too had their own version of what was done there, and this version was the mirror-image of Mrs. Trilling's language: the Russians were "helping the Hungarians to resist Fascist aggression." This was rightly regarded as loathsome hypocrisy on the part of the Russians. On what grounds should equivalent American language on Vietnam be regarded in any other light? If the comparison is pursued, Russian policy in Hungary comes off in some ways better than American policy in Vietnam. The Soviet Union had, after all, not very long before, been invaded from, among other places, Hungary and by, among other people, Hungarians. The Soviet Government had, therefore, rather more warrant for alarm at the emergence of a potentially hostile Government there than the American Government has about an equivalent development in distant Vietnam. And the comparative duration of the armed struggle in the two countries would suggest that many Vietnamese dislike American "help" even more than many Hungarians disliked the Soviet kind.

The only way the comparison may be turned in America's favor is by the departure of American troops and control from Vietnam. It was encouraging to see how many of your replies pointed in that direction. Some of them pointed more clearly than others. In particular I liked Tom Hayden's contribution.

Sidney Hook

1. There are many things wrong with America. But there are still many more things that are right. The prospect for a better democratic society depends upon righting what is wrong with the same intelligent and courageous spirit that inspired enormous victories in the field of civil rights and social welfare during the last two decades. These victories although far from insuring that the long war against racial oppression and poverty will soon be won have nonetheless irreversible ef-

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fects. Even the irresponsibility of organized violence will not undo them although they may for a time cause the pace of development to slacken.

Despite the joyful lamentations and cheerful despair of would-be revolutionists who profess to see no progress towards a better social order in the last few years and who declare the civil rights movement bankrupt, a sober comparison of the state of the union today and a few years ago exposes the irresponsible wish-thinking behind these judgments. There is no space nor need to present the material indices of the progress made or detail the impressive record of legislation in the fields of social welfare and civil rights.

I mention two things, however, that seem to me to symbolize both how far we have come and the promise of better things.

Today the proposal of a guaranteed income for every family in the United States is no longer a utopian fantasy but is a subject of serious discussion. Granted that even this would not be enough to meet the problems of poverty and that it would have to be accompanied by a massive investment by federal, state and municipal government in the sector of the public services. But can anyone imagine this or a similar proposal being considered even a decade ago? As I write, a Negro educator has become the Executive Officer of the Board of Education in Little Rock, Arkansas, with the power to appoint all teachers. Could anyone have imagined this at the time of the riot of the Southern red-necks against Negro children at Little Rock—when even Senator Fulbright was deafeningly silent in the U.S. about these outrages, but discussed them—of all places—in Asia[!] where he denounced the attempt to enforce the Supreme Court's decision as a "Republican gimmick"?

Of course it makes a tremendous difference who occupies the Presidency of the United States because of the vast powers which go with the office. For one thing the President is Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces and can commit the military to actions fraught with enormous importance to the country. For another, the character of the Supreme Court which functions in effect as a third legislative body in our political system largely depends upon him. (I shall not pursue the question further because I have considered it at length in my *The Hero in History: A Study in Limitation and Possibility.*) Although it is true that no President can undo the gains won, or extricate himself easily from the errors made, by his predecessor, the nature and direction of future programs lie in his hands.

For all his power, the outcome of events does not depend entirely, often not even mainly, on the President. In our imperfect pluralistic democracy, many different groups exercise a relatively independent influence on the shape of things to come. I see no reason to write off the

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potentialities of the labor movement as an independent political force in the future. What is now required is a renewed organizing campaign centered around cultural and political as well as broad economic issues.

2. To the extent that they exercise any influence on political affairs, the great danger that I see in the posturing and ranting of the so-called alienated intellectuals and extremist student and Negro groups in American life today is that they are contributing to the growth and victory of political reaction. It was the riots in Watts and the disorder in Berkeley that helped Reagan sweep into power in California. Some of the leaders and apologists of these events were perfectly aware of this and welcomed it on the basis of the most dangerous and historically discredited of all political principles—"the worse now, the better ultimately." More often than not, the worse is followed by more of the worse, if not the worst.

It is time to speak frankly about the New Left, especially among the student youth. Television and the modern press have given this movement an influence out of all proportion to its numbers. Administrative folly and faculty cowardice have played into its hands. They have permitted a comparative handful to manipulate a largely passive student body and to appear as spokesmen of those whose real educational interest they are actually injuring.

I have been in close touch with student youth in this country for fifty years. I have never been an admirer of youth as such—in contrast to so many who have whored after their acclaim—ever since I was beaten up by my chauvinistic fellow students for opposing our entry into the First World War. In a long academic career I have met more young fogies than I have old fools. The radical student movement of my youth was minuscular, passionately interested in freedom and supremely confident in the power of argument and reason. We never shouted down those who disagreed with us or refused to give anyone a hearing. Conservative speakers from the National Security League were our meat. Even the radical student movements of the thirties, largely controlled by the Young Communist League and its dogmas, were at the outset largely interested in debating important social ideas and programs. They drew the line only with respect to a dialogue with those socialists and "Trotskyists" whom they couldn't snare into their popular fronts. Too many elements of the New Left among the students today, as one of its twenty-eight-year-old spokesmen has put it, are drawn "to the absurd and the irrational" and "to a little pot." I am not denying that they are capable of heroic action and sacrifice. But heroism and sacrifice are politically neutral. Students the world over of all political tendencies

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exhibit these virtues; even the Nazi youth movement, especially those influenced by the Stefan George circle, were not devoid of them.

The trouble with a movement drawn to absurdity is that it makes its members more receptive to apologies for atrocities. The cult of irresponsibility means indifference to consequences, including the consequences of violence. The result is inconsistency and hypocrisy. Admirers of Castro and Mao quite properly condemn the rioting of white racists against Negroes despite the presence of the social determinants in their environmental conditions which account for their prejudices and bestialities. But they excuse the rioting of black racists and/or freedom looters on the ground that their riotous behavior is determined by their life in the slums. In other words, the white red-necks are morally responsible for their conduct but the Negroes are like objects or things whose behavior is a physical reaction to a stimulus, not a differential human response that involves a responsible choice. But after all, not all Negroes riot; most of them do not. There is more practical wisdom and sounder philosophy in Roy Wilkins' observation that "there are white punks and Negro punks" than in all the misapplied social determinism of the New Left.

The events in Berkeley which mark the decline of the traditional conception of the American university, however imperfectly realized, as a community of scholars and teachers dedicated to the discovery and publication of the truth, have been widely misunderstood throughout the country. All sorts of myths and legends have grown up, some of them sedulously cultivated by the leaders of that group among the faculty at Berkeley which misled the Academic Senate into giving what was in effect a vote of approval to the capture of Sproul Hall by the FSM in November, 1964. I have elsewhere discussed the details at length ("Second Thoughts on Berkeley," *Teachers College Record*, October 1966) and documented my charge that it was the faculty that bears primary responsibility for developments at Berkeley, because of its failure, first to check the Administration, and then to rebuke the excesses of the student minority. Even today a considerable section of the faculty refuses to condemn the activities of those whose primary interest is to use the University as a sanctuary for student and nonstudent "guerrilla warfare" against society, to seize upon genuine or fancied grievances within the University, and instead of seeking to redress them through the use of the legal methods and procedures available to them, organize illegal incidents in the eager expectation that this will bring the police on the campus, and discredit the liberal administration.

Clark Kerr's position was already undermined by the actions of the

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leaders of the FSM and their faculty allies before the Regents dismissed him. Their strategy was to get rid of the liberal Kerr, who on one sign was called a "cur," in order to confront the class enemy unmasked. Just as some of the extremists of the Negro rights movement have denounced "the white liberal" as their most dangerous and hypocritical foe, so have some of the leading spirits of the radical student movement denounced as their most dangerous enemy the liberal Kerr and his handful of mostly mute faculty supporters. Immediately after Kerr's dismissal, Mario Savio and a few cohorts issued a statement in which they exultantly declared: "Good riddance to bad rubbish. The multiversity is dead; long live the University. The new governor's administration has started auspiciously" (*U.C. Daily Californian*, 1/23/67, "Radicals Applaud Dismissal of President Clark Kerr"). On second thought the members of the group admitted having spoken in haste. All they retracted, with tongue in cheek, was the word "rubbish." "We were wrong to call any man 'rubbish'" (1/25/67). Although other activist leaders were less offensive, they made no secret of the fact that they did not regret in the least Kerr's dismissal.

3. I do not believe that the majority of the American people are racists. The opposition to open-housing laws can be attributed to various factors, not least among them to Negro riots. In time the justice of legislation outlawing discrimination in housing will be recognized despite the opposition of a small group of racial bigots. The passage of a national fair-housing bill is only a matter of a few years unless the country is torn by racial strife. Meanwhile a great deal can be done to accelerate the trend towards school desegregation, especially in the South, and to enforce existing rights under recent civil rights legislation.

The defeat of the Civilian Review Board in New York, although a keen disappointment, was not a triumph for racism. During the course of numerous conversations with friends and neighbors in which I presented "unanswerable" arguments for the retention of the Civilian Review Board, I convinced myself that most of those voting against it did so out of a simple and irrational fear that the streets of New York City would become even more unsafe if the Board were retained. The campaign for the retention of the Board blundered badly in implying that it was primarily needed for the protection of Negroes and Puerto Ricans against police brutality and arbitrary arrest. Most of those who voted against the Board did so in the belief that they were voting for their own protection.

Those who like Susan Sontag assert that "America was founded on genocide," that the American people are "racist," that "the white race *is* the cancer of human history," far more threatening than the

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Mongol hordes, have themselves fallen into the easy clichés of racism with its incitements to blind and stupid violence. They are also insincere. Every privilege and comfort Miss Sontag enjoys she owes to those whom she denounces as racists and murderers. If she accepts the Hitlerian doctrine of collective responsibility and guilt by association let her resign from her country, culture and race and make it up to the Indians and the African tribes whose historical crimes against the members of their own races differ from those of the whites only in scale.

Miss Sontag regards Marx as a "fink" because he was not as sexually liberated as the youngsters whom she approves of, but she can still learn a great deal from him. In her wholesale condemnation of America and the white race she sounds like some of the young who sneer at Greek culture because it was a slave society. What she and they forget is that the Greeks did not invent slavery; they invented freedom. The ideals of the Declaration of Independence which inspired movements of freedom everywhere, including Africa and Asia, and whose very existence was everywhere construed as a threat to privilege, have had a profounder importance for world history than the decayed institutions inherited from the past. To judge the Greeks or the American settlers today by ideals which were their groping, creative discoveries in a time of universal darkness is to spit into the waters from which one has drunk. Morally we are responsible today for the things that our own actions or failure to act can affect, not for the tragedies and evils of the historical past. This moral judgment is perfectly compatible with an historical point of view that accepts the fact that our primitive mothers were not as sophisticated as Miss Sontag. This does not mean they lived with less wisdom and integrity. A good case can be made for the view that because they lived in ways different from hers, they made her independent way of life and thought possible. She has no sense for historical alternatives and probabilities, and like a spoiled child cries out because not all things are possible at all times. Even slavery as an institution was morally preferable to the destruction or cannibalizing of the prisoners of war which it gradually replaced. The colonization by the cancerous white race as a movement of peoples should be compared to the movements of the people led by Genghis Khan or Attila. There were good settlers and bad settlers, and Miss Sontag's blanket condemnation of them *all* from William Penn to the whiskey traders expresses not really a judgment but lack of it.

Miss Sontag's extreme remarks are most charitably interpreted as a kind of misplaced metaphysical rebellion at the condition of man. The white race isn't much but the other races aren't much better! The trouble really lies with the whole human race. All metaphysical rebellion

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is *au fond* the consequence of a frustrated religious yearning for a cosmos that embodies a consoling ethos.

The danger of the wholesale negations of metaphysical rebellion is that it blinds us to the real alternatives our sorry world still provides. Its political wisdom tends to run out in variations of the cry: "The world stinks!" We don't need Miss Sontag to tell us this. Her philosophy doesn't remove the stink. If anything it makes it worse, for it seems to imply that because the world stinks, there is no need for plumbing.

Marx, "that fink," was no simpleminded believer in inevitable progress. He was aware of the ambiguities and tragedies of history. He does not spare his criticism of the harsh features of British colonialism but neither does he glorify the rule it overthrew.[1]

4. No intellectual worthy of the name can give a blank check to the Johnson administration or any administration. But it seems to me to be foolish and irresponsible to make a principle out of blank refusal to cooperate with or to endorse the position of the Administration on all questions because of disagreement with its policy on some. The life of intelligence consists in making relevant discriminations. But there are some issues that are more important to the country than the prestige of the occupant of the White House whoever he be. A person convinced

1. English interference . . . dissolved these small, semi-barbarian, semi-civilized communities . . . and thus produced the greatest, and so to speak, the only *social* revolution ever heard of in Asia.

Now, sickening as it must be to human feelings to witness those myriads of industrious patriarchal and inoffensive social organizations disorganized and dissolved into their units, thrown into a sea of woes, and their individual members losing at the same time their ancient form of civilization, and their hereditary means of subsistence, we must not forget that these idyllic village communities, inoffensive though they may appear, had always been the solid foundation of Oriental despotism, that they restrained the human mind within the smallest possible compass, making it the unresisting tool of superstition, enslaving it beneath traditional rules, depriving it of all grandeur and historical energies. We must not forget the barbarian egotism which, concentrating on some miserable patch of land, had quietly witnessed the ruin of empires, the perpetration of unspeakable cruelties, the massacre of the population of large towns, with no other consideration bestowed upon them than on natural events, itself the helpless prey of any aggressor who deigned to notice it at all. We must not forget that this undignified, stagnatory, and vegetative life, that this passive sort of existence evoked on the other part, in contradistinction, wild, aimless, unbounded forces of destruction and rendered murder itself a religious rite in Hindustan. We must not forget that these little communities were contaminated by distinctions of caste, and by slavery, that they subjugated man to external circumstances instead of elevating man into the sovereign of circumstances, that they transformed a self-developing social state into never changing natural destiny, and thus brought about a brutalizing worship of nature, exhibiting its degradation in the fact that man, the sovereign of nature, fell down on his knees in adoration of Hanuman, the monkey, and Sabbala, the cow [*New York Daily Tribune*, 6/25/1853].

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of the overriding need to improve the school system of the country by laying down national guide-lines or of reconstructing our cities or of devising workable strategies of implementing civil rights legislation, or of establishing birth control clinics—even of developing art centers in all cities—would be foolish to refuse a genuine opportunity offered by the government to further his ideals merely because he disagrees with its current foreign policy—provided, of course, he does not surrender his freedom of publicly dissenting from that policy. I can conceive a situation in which the only honorable thing for any person to do would be to refuse to serve a government in *any* official capacity—for example if the regime were totalitarian. But those who classify the American regime today in such terms are guilty of an irresponsibility from whose consequences they escape precisely bcause their charges are so absurd.

For a number of reasons I could not bring myself to vote for Johnson in the last elections, and when it was overwhelmingly evident that Goldwater didn't stand a ghost of a chance of being elected, I voted for the least objectionable of the opposition parties I could find—the Socialist Labor Party. But if there had been any danger that Goldwater would be elected, I would have voted for Johnson. The statement that those who voted for Johnson might just as well have voted for Goldwater because the former adopted the program of the latter is another piece of irresponsible nonsense. Goldwater was and is bitterly opposed to almost every aspect of the Great Society program as well as to the measures taken to strengthen civil rights. And with respect to foreign policy he would have obliterated the whole of Vietnam instead of restricting the bombing to military installations and supply centers, and probably attacked the Chinese nuclear bomb sites. Under Goldwater the United States would probably have been engaged—alone—in total war unless North Vietnam had capitulated to a threat of such war.

5. Despite charges to the contrary it seems to me incontestable that the Johnson administration would like to bring hostilities to an end in South Vietnam and permit its people to determine their own destinies whatever government they chose. I believe that our involvement in South Vietnam under French influence was a great mistake. But the consequences of that mistake cannot now be rectified by withdrawal before certain minimal conditions have been met by North Vietnam and the Vietcong. In the absence of these minimal conditions such withdrawal would be a greater mistake.

Were the United States to accept the conditions laid down by the North Vietnamese and the Vietcong, it would mean abandoning close to 900,000 refugees from North Vietnam to indiscriminate slaughter as

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well as the even greater numbers who have continued to resist the Vietcong in the South in the expectation that their American allies would not desert them. We have every reason to assume this political bloodbath will take place on the basis of Communist behavior in the past. There is evidence that a considerable section of the South Vietnamese, fearful that the Americans will tire and leave them in the lurch, and frightened by the news of growing American domestic opposition to our presence, have sought to take out insurance policies with the Vietcong and are playing a waiting game. Nonetheless there is just as impressive evidence that the great majority of the South Vietnamese do not want to be ruled by the Vietcong.

Under the circumstances the United States cannot now leave South Vietnam unless some guaranteed provision is made for the safety of the hundreds of thousands threatened with decimation under the terror regime of the Vietcong. If the United States writes them off, it makes itself coresponsible for the bloodshed and torture that will follow. The consequences will not only be the revival of isolationism in the United States and the probable victory of political chauvinism, but a setback to the cause of those struggling against Communist tyranny everywhere.

Many of the critics of American policy in Vietnam have been operating with a double standard of political morality. They have rightfully opposed American military escalation, but have refused to condemn North Vietnam and Vietcong military escalation. They have taxed the United States with practicing "genocide" because of the unfortunate and accidental bombing of some civilian centers in North Vietnam, but have refused to condemn the deliberate and sustained torture and murder of tens of thousands of South Vietnamese civilians at the hands of the Vietcong. They have condemned South Vietnamese regimes because of the absence of democratic political processes and have remained silent before the political terror of North Vietnam and the Vietcong. As unsatisfactory as the South Vietnam political situation is to a democrat, it has permitted a substantial degree of opposition, some of it quite effective. Not even a trace of opposition is permitted in the regions controlled by Ho Chi Minh and the Vietcong. The Vietcong are no more "agrarian reformers" than were the Chinese Communists.

More than a century ago John Stuart Mill in his essay "On Non-Intervention," laid down three principles which seem to me still valid in their bearing on events in South Vietnam and elsewhere. The first is: "To go to war for an idea, if the war is aggressive, not defensive, is as criminal as to go to war for territory or revenue; for it is as little justifiable to force our ideas on other people, as to compel them to submit to our will in any other respect." This seems to me to be an axiom

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of political sanity. We cannot liberate people against their will. When Bertrand Russell, in urging a preventive atomic war against the Soviet Union in 1948, declared "Communism must be wiped out and world-government established," he was advocating a war on behalf of an idea which, however valid, is certainly not worth the costs of its attempted imposition.

The second principle is:

> The doctrine of non-intervention, to be a legitimate principle of morality, must be accepted by all governments. The despots must consent to be bound by it as well as free states. Unless they do, the profession of it by free countries comes but to this miserable issue, that the wrong side may help the wrong side but the right may not help the right. . . . Though it may be a mistake to give freedom [or independence S.H.] to a people who do not value the boon, it cannot but be right to insist that if they do value it, they shall not be hindered from the pursuit of it by foreign coercion.

It was the disregard of this principle which led to the victory of Franco over democratic, Republican Spain. Fascist Italy and Germany intervened massively, England and France did not, while the United States adopted a neutrality resolution which was used as a pretext to deny the sale of arms to the legal government of Spain.

The third principle is expressed in a sentence I omitted from the paragraph above: "Intervention to enforce non-intervention is always right, always moral, if not always prudent." No foreign policy devoid of morality is worthy of the support of a free people, but sometimes intelligent prudential considerations may enter into a larger moral view of what is to be done. Even though in general intervention to enforce nonintervention is right, a consideration of the likely consequences may show the intervention to be unwise. I happen to believe that our intervention in Hungary in 1955 would have led the Soviet Union to withdraw its troops from Eastern Europe *without war*. But if those responsible for the decision were convinced that the consequences would have been a World War, they were right *not* to intervene to prevent Soviet intervention, for Hungary would have been destroyed in the process of liberating it.

The original error in Vietnam was made in our postwar failure to take the same attitude towards France's colonial empire in Asia as we did to that of Holland. Edwin Reischauer's testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, especially in his exchanges with Fulbright, Morse and others, inadequately and misleadingly reported in the press, describes the entire Asian situation with balance, keen historical perception and, that rarest of virtues these days, political common sense.

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Dennis H. Wrong

1. Where foreign policy is concerned it makes a lot of difference who is President, as most of your respondents in the Winter issue recognize. With the decline of immigrant groups emotionally involved in the affairs of their homelands, there are few domestic constituencies on foreign policy issues that national politicians have to take into account. I agree with Michael Harrington that a popular President can lead the country and create rather than merely reflect a consensus on foreign affairs, although he may fritter away his opportunities to do so, as Johnson perhaps has already done. Only big wars, actual or threatening, bite deeply enough into the consciousness of the electorate to limit sharply the President's freedom of action. With regard to Vietnam, the evidence from the past is conflicting.

Several of your respondents are fearful that continuing frustrations in Vietnam and even possible defeat will lead to further American military commitments in Asia and an upsurge of superpatriotism and suppression of dissent at home which will increase the risk of nuclear war with Russia or China or both. Certainly this is a real and terrifying possibility. When mobilized against a foreign enemy, Americans become belligerently overcommitted to the struggle and a mood of "getting it over with for once and all" takes hold in a country that has never experienced direct military attack or invasion and cannot seem to grasp the irrelevance of all past wars to a war with nuclear weapons (Susan Sontag's taxi-driver is altogether representative here). Twenty years of Cold War have forged a link between patriotism and the anti-Communist rhetoric our leaders regularly trot out to defend their questionable actions in Vietnam, Cuba, the Dominican Republic or wherever.

But what about Korea? Is it not the best precedent for the probable outcome of the war in Vietnam? The Korean War was a bigger war, it occurred when Cold War passions were at a peak, with Stalin and McCarthy both in business, and the chief critics of the Truman Administration's conduct of the war were hawks eager to escalate it. Yet in two years it became an unpopular war and Eisenhower was able to end it although the military outcome was ambiguous. Fifteen years later, the Munich analogy that had seemed relevant to Korea has become threadbare in light of the détente with Russia and the internal upheaval in China. Influential national politicians oppose the Vietnamese war and their number is bound to increase as the 1968 elections approach. Larger casualty lists and expanded troop commitments are deepening

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the impact of the war on the American public. Is it really being so foolishly optimistic, as Paul Jacobs suggests, to think a compromise peace likely under these circumstances?

Of course, the chief prerequisite for such a peace must be a continuation of vigorous public opposition to the war. I don't think that Johnson is committed to a messianic, neo-imperialist view of America's global destiny to police the world. His relative ignorance of foreign policy and his heavy-handed, bullying political style have led him to fall back on stock "let's draw a line here" Cold War responses in situations where they are brutally inappropriate. But his political realism may yet induce him to extricate himself and us from this degrading, disgusting and pointless war.

2 and 3. Inflation undoubtedly can and will be checked by those fiscal policies that will be least damaging to the interests of the corporations and the home-owning middle class. Which means new excuses for reducing existing social programs and again forgetting the so recently rediscovered poor. Yet if our political leaders could, in a time both of relative prosperity and of international tension, be roused once, however hesitantly and briefly, by the scandal of continuing poverty, the plight of the poor is likely to remain a focus of liberal-left politics. Would *PR* even have mentioned poverty as a major problem ten years ago? We have now become aware that the "system" neither needs an exploited underclass to continue functioning nor eliminates poverty automatically in maintaining economic growth—it simply bypasses the poor. In the society but not of it, the poor can only be helped by reforms that directly confront and change the conditions of their existence. I don't anticipate such reforms in the near future, but I think the demand for them will continue to be part of our politics. Even conservative economists have, for example, advocated a negative income tax. Will it take as long to put into effect this fairly simple idea as it took to put across Medicare? I fear it may.

4. White Americans have been ready to go along with granting greater equality to the Negro only so long as it didn't affect their own lives directly. Now much of the public is ready to seize on any excuse —the riots, "crime in the streets," Stokely Carmichael—to justify calling a halt. I'm afraid white backlash is here to stay. Unlike some of your other respondents, however, I'm not sure that it is simply an expression of straightforward and enduring racism. Many lower-class and lower-middle-class whites are, I think, envious of what they perceive as an oversolicitous and coddling attitude toward the Negro on the part of the government and the powers that be in general. The reasonable idea that Negroes deserve not merely equal but preferential treatment in

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order to remedy the damage done to them by past oppression is utter anathema to such people. "What about us? Don't we have tough lives too and ask no favors?" is their self-pitying response. They are totally incapable of grasping the extent of the harm done to the Negro ("Look at Willie Mays? Wasn't he a poor kid?"), a harm that is unlike anything ever experienced by a group of comparable size in American history. But then, judging from their reactions to the Moynihan Report, many civil rights leaders and white liberals are equally unable to face up to this fact. I don't think there will be a polarization of the races because of the almost incredible patience and reasonableness of so many Negroes themselves, but it is going to take a Third Reconstruction to abolish the racial ghetto in the slums and at the moment this is not in the offing.

5 and 6. Perhaps we face another interlude like the fifties with Wallaces and Reagans threatening in the wings and stuffed-shirts untainted by either ideological liberalism or Johnsonian political guile (Romney?) acquiring the authority to end the war in Vietnam and at least hold what gains in international sanity and social welfare were made in the past few years. The ending of the war, however, could permit us to regain some forward momentum. I hope Tom Kahn's prognosis is right.

7. Your last question invites too easy an affirmative response. Who but romantic reactionaries will deny that there is hope in the activities and outlook of young people? Anyone over forty who is likely to be included in this symposium has made compromises with the world, has learned to live with hypocrisies and injustices and needs the moral prod administered by young people seeing these for what they are for the first time. And yet we are stuck with our sad wisdom, sadder because so many of the extreme forms of youthful exploration extolled by Susan Sontag far transcend our own experience and yet have their origins in it.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Sirs:

. . . Mr. Duberman feels that the potentiality of an SDS-type youth movement is limited since students are overwhelmingly white and middle-class, and very few of them can make an "emotional identification" with the poor and the black. . . . There is a growing awareness, in SDS particularly, that the deeper motivation behind our revolt is the painful knowledge that even as white, middle-class students we are in a very real sense "deprived" in America. Deprived, that is, of the possibility of realizing in any permanent way certain basic human values in our own lives. The kind of life which faces most of us when we leave the university—a life within the dehumanizing machinery of modern technological bureaucracy—seems to offer very little in the way of real satisfactions, and it is this realization, rather than "emotional identification" with the poor, which is at the root of the student rebellion. In other words, the activist feels that it is not only the salvation of the poor and of the Negro which depends on radical social change, but his own personal salvation as well. . . .

Miss Sontag speaks most eloquently of her own disgust with the disturbing quality of American life; she sees, quite rightly, the whole spectrum of student rebellion—hair styles, dances, drugs, etc.—as symptomatic of a general revolt against that way of life. Yet her now well-known role as enthusiastic apologist of the avant-garde keeps her from making distinctions or judgments. She seems to see all manifestations of student revolt as part of a unified upsurge, and as being all equally laudable. Is she unaware of the fact that unification of student revolt is a *problem,* not a *fait accompli*? She speaks of being a socialist and taking drugs regularly as if this were the archetypal figure of student revolt. She must know, however, that the activist and the hippie, although there is some overlap, tend to face each other with distrust and sometimes contempt. . . .

Robert Woods Sayre
New York, New York

Sirs:

. . . I was reading the symposium in the Winter issue on the train down from Cambridge to Hodderdon, the suburb of London where I lecture for the Workers' Educational Association. I was very depressed by it; I had no idea of the intensity of the disaffection between the intellectuals and the government. I'm teaching a course on Baldwin, under the aegis, the Negro in American Literature, and

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thought I would read excerpts from the symposium (esp. the 4th question) to my class. I've been trying to find some way to reach my class, because their comments on the fiction and Baldwin's essays are, as one of them put it, "from the converted." . . .

The people in the class are a cross-section of sorts, a civil servant, a couple of teachers, housewives, two professionals, students and an industrial economist. They sat stonily silent at the repeated assertion that the US was racist. The apocalyptic tone seemed, to them, eminently *American*. The term "backlash" meant nothing, but they all recognized the references to Sharpsville. I guess this is to be expected. They were puzzled about Susan Sontag (some having seen her on the telly): and quite derisive about Diana Trilling's comment on socialism and racial prejudice.

I had hoped the passages I read out would surprise them. It turns out, among the "converted," that there is a fatalistic sense of "it's only a matter of time before it (American racial problems and strife) will happen in England."

Eric Honsberger
Cambridge, England

Sirs:

. . . My exhaustion stems from the recognition, after eight months of futile organizing activity in the ghetto and two years of impotently protesting Johnson's foreign policy, that I cannot use my power in any way at all to change social and economic inequality at home, and our impulse to impose military solutions on political problems abroad. . . .

I read that a group of students wrote a well publicized letter to Secretary Rusk expressing their "concern" over our Vietnam policy. I read it not with hope, but with the exhaustion of frustration. For rather than pinpoint any of the Administration's blatant lies or fantastic appraisals, the letter merely provided the Secretary with another sounding board for Yahoo propaganda. . . .

The students knew [the facts]. They should have included [them] and a thousand other . . . facts in their letter. Instead, they ask whether our vital interests are really at stake in Vietnam. Rusk himself could not have written a sweeter take-off question. . . .

After seeing the best minds of their generation get splattered with paint, thrown into prison, and sent to slaughter yellow-skinned peasants (kill a commie for Christ), a group of student leaders write their letter of concern, a letter which serves only to help the administration spread its double-talk. . . .

So the Vietcong cheer for the Indians while Ky's troops have yet to believe that their (our) cause is just. And students write a letter of concern. It's exhausting, really it is.

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So let the shitstorm come. For the only "promise to be found in the activities of the young people today" lies in the extent to which those activities are geared toward hastening its occurrence.

Nathan Weber
New York, New York

Sirs:

Last year, in a public high school in New York City, where I taught remedial reading to teenagers who couldn't read at all, I learned that in my two classes of sixteen students not one had heard the word atom (let alone hydrogen or whatever the new weapons are called) bomb. They knew about Vietnam and about the war on poverty because they were immediately affected by them both, but this other thing—"atomic"—was a new word. Last week, when I read the Winter *PR*, I discovered that there are sixteen middle-aged writers who exist as if they hadn't heard it either. . . .

When I told these children last year about the bomb—despite their exposure to violence—their reaction was one of disbelief and their questions were so logically angry: "Why?" "How could we let this happen?"

. . . We have allowed to become inevitable what never had to be inevitable at all.

. . . Faulkner seems to have been wrong when he said, in his Nobel Prize speech, that "our tragedy today is a general and universal fear." I am afraid that we are not enough afraid.

(Mrs.) Barbara L. Estrin
Providence, Rhode Island

Sirs:

Enclosed is my response to your questionnaire about what we all think is happening in America. It is I admit quite an irrational reply, but I am a fairly irrational person in a fairly insane society.

I am a senior at Western Michigan University who will soon be migrating to Berkeley or the San Francisco State College. . . .

What's happening in America is that so many of us are writing about what's happening in America that what actually is happening in America is completely obscured from rational view, is more chaotic than ever. Multiple polarization has come into being at all levels of non-life. Since the total absurdity of the entire undertaking has been assured I am ready to join the Sontags, Joneses and Johnsons by wasting good rhetoric and *ensoi* logic on the whole insoluable mess.

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. . . My answers (though they're not really) to your questionnaire:

1. No. As long as he's God how can we go wrong?

2. Inflation: Pretty good if you're Phineas Fogg. Poverty: Pretty bad if you're broke. That is, if you're a schoolteacher, farmer, student, hillbilly, Negro, social worker, six childrened divorcee, unemployed, laborer or convict.

3. One is arrogant and the other is irreproachable. Hard to tell which is which at any one instant.

4. Yes, if whites grant equality like the Pentagon grants defense contracts.

5. Back to pre-history.

6. Nothing really will ever happen in America. Illusions of progress and events but only a TV image. The tubes haven't changed and we're still plugged into the same socket. The United States will continue to exist in its present state of chaotic ennui until it blows the world to kingdom gone.

7. Yes, there is promise in the activities of young people today, but since you don't specify which young people I will consider both groups. The majority of young people will fall blindly into the system's pattern and promise, insure the events mentioned in response to question 6. The minority (myself included) will be silenced by the monolith in the most efficient manner possible and whenever necessary, which might not be very far from now. It's a simple matter of philomethodology. The media is the massage.

Robert M. Gerfy
Kalamazoo, Michigan

Sirs:

May a passionately interested outsider throw in a few remarks mainly on the question of promise in the activities of the young in America, and in the world at large, since USA sets the tone, particularly in this respect to the rest of the world. . . .

Susan Sontag's sponsoring of the alienated youth is . . . so sympathetic that one would like to agree with her. . . .

[But] the whole Decline of the West romanticism—giving up the boat before it is really sinking—behind her portraying of the young dissenters is a kind of defeatism unlikely to help the soulsearching of young *or* old. . . . And while granting the dissenting youth of today the normal percentage of generous impulse, intelligence and disgust with cant that has always been characteristic of the best of any young generation, one can safely assume, from direct and indirect evidence, that there has been *no* mutation, endowing the present youth, in or out of America, with new and supernatural powers of distinction, sophistication and sensitivity. . . . And the last people who will be helped by overrating are the overrated young.

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. . . There is, in America that has been so long under the tightfitting lid of puritanism, currently an obsessive talking about what was obsessively not-talked about before, viz. physical sex, including deviations. . . . There is nothing to indicate that talking "sensibly" about sex, or having it, as a means of communication or knowledge or whatnot, and admitting to doubts about the ridiculous "Western masculinity" that nobody but fools (who are, it is true, the majority) ever took seriously anyway, or sporting a bisexuality that is no news to civilized people of any generation, and was never a secret to artists in any age—that any of this, or the spread of middle-class youth of promiscuous habits that in earlier periods and other societies were reserved for the very rich and the very poor, has solved more problems than it has created for the young who have not yet begun to know who they are or what their life is about or in what private coin they will have to pay for their public privileges, sexual and otherwise. . . . Let, by all means, the young *have* all the sex they can manage. . . . The more the merrier, I'm certainly not against the sexually undernourished middle-class American youth(or so far a tiny section of it) getting their share of what used to be the pleasures of the power elite. . . .

. . . Or the drug-cult, mixed with undigested Oriental mysticism and various instant philosophies contrived to disprove the existence of the individual, with a dash of primitive socialism incongruously added for spice (*all* American socialism is by definition primitive, so this is nothing against the young)—do let them try it all. . . .

. . . [Although] I don't share Mr. Fiedler's views on a lot of things, his "tradition of the human" is a wide enough term for the ideals (and ideals *are* realities) of respect for both the self and the others, of belief in the critical clarity and the light of reason, of social understanding, of a passion for justice, both in the Greek sense of the balance of things and the general ethical sense, of personal conscience and responsibility, of the saving grace of love, both as *agape* and as *eros*—in short of the whole frame of reference in terms of which Susan Sontag herself condemns the abominations the white race has also perpetrated on the world. It might be noted that none of these traits are dominant in the Eastern civilizations, whatever their other virtues may be.

. . . Western civilization, in its American form as in its other forms, has been pernicious and is now foundering, if indeed it is, from a betrayal of these values, not from a surfeit of them. . . . If the dissenting young are half as good, beautiful, sensitive and full of complex desires, as Susan Sontag thinks, and the plight of their society half as bad, they are certainly worth criticism from and communication with the rest of us, not just uncritical admiration for an "openness" they have so far not been asked to pay for, or vague hopes for their salvation, at the cost of the condemnation of the rest of the human race, or at least its American constituents.

Elsa Gress
Glumso, Denmark

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Frederick C. Crews

LOVE IN THE WESTERN WORLD

Americans tend to pride themselves on their eagerness to solve the world's problems. In agency reports and Sunday supplements one finds much benevolent discussion of the steps that should be taken against war, overpopulation, poverty, famine, plague, pollution and so forth. The discussion has a business-like air; first you find the means and then you do the job. Yet this progressive spirit is inadequate to explain our behavior in actual cases—to take one instance, our government's withholding grain from millions of starving Indians last year during some ruthless bargaining over the terms of "cooperation" imposed by an American fertilizer combine. To my mind the exploitative aspect of this behavior was less interesting than the fact that few Americans who read about it seemed to consider it bothersome—and those who read about it include, no doubt, some future authors of articles on the plight of India. The relevant question is not "What can we do about India?" but "Why is it so hard for us to understand our own feelings toward India?" Marxian terms take us part way toward an answer, but in the last analysis they are insufficiently radical. Indifference or hostility toward those who are poor and distant and colored is a psychological matter, one which involves not only our economic interest but also our shared fantasies and our available modes of expressing feeling.

Enthusiasts of the Vietnam war, for example, are fond of showing that our involvement cannot be properly explained in "selfish" terms; they then go on to make such fanciful remarks about treaty obligations and the championing of self-determination and democracy—remarks which have no basis in any known facts—that one must interpret them as unconscious hypocrisy. Evidently there are unacknowledgeable gratifications in the busywork of this particular war: eradicating villages, poisoning the crops of whole districts, dropping thousands of tons of explosives within map-coordinates which ought by the laws of probability to contain some enemy soldiers, bull-

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dozing miles of jungle that may have been "infested" with "gooks," etc. The military ineffectuality of most of these enterprises does not seem to be demoralizing; on the contrary, there is a note of uplift in reports of the sheer choreography of each logistically intricate "operation." A week-long undertaking which flattens the countryside but makes no contact with opposing troops is felt to be "the biggest operation of the war" and *ipso facto* worthwhile. To account for this patent lunacy one must ask in all seriousness how the observed action expresses our society's needs to standardize its environment, to exercise its technical skills cathartically, to excrete its most dangerous products without staying to observe the mess and to "show its muscle" before potentially mocking bystanders. At the very least we should expect our political scientists not to confine the notion of mass irrationality to Nazi Germany, as they like to do. We need an Erik Erikson and a Norman Cohn to analyze the Hitler within ourselves, and beyond this we need a theory that will make allowance for the element of fantasy-enactment in social dealings generally. It is conceivable that our survival might depend on a willingness to abandon utilitarian models of strife and instead to isolate the syndrome of *homo economicus,* who grasps and hoards, sublimates and rationalizes, purifies himself and contaminates others, shrinks from strangers and finally attributes to them the implacable destructiveness of his own temperament.

In recent years only Herbert Marcuse and Norman O. Brown have dared to speculate at length about a future order that could be based on a new mental economy. On close inspection, however, Marcuse's commitment to psychoanalysis appears far from revolutionary. The unfettering of instinct he rather circumspectly entertains in *Eros and Civilization* entails no rupture with the status quo. It would be "predicated not upon the arrest, but upon the liberation, of progress"; it could only be attempted "*after* culture had done its work and created the mankind and the world that could be free." With this accommodation to the institutions he criticizes, it is little wonder that Marcuse arrives at a wistful sentimentalism, offering little more than a vague prospect that death "can be made rational—painless." Again, in *One-Dimensional Man* Marcuse locates his hope in "the completion of the technological reality," which would be "not only the prerequisite, but also the rationale for *transcending* the technological reality." This may be good dialectics but it amounts to fatal-

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ism; Marcuse cannot think beyond the welfare state and the self-improving hobbies of leisure time. Brown, in contrast, promises nothing less than a "diagnosis of the universal neurosis of mankind, in which psychoanalysis is itself a symptom and a stage"; and his diagnosis is followed by a prescription for total cure.

To come under the spell of *Life Against Death,* as many of us did eight years ago, is to be lifted suddenly above the plane of academic cliché and to conceive a new intensity of self-investigation. Here, perhaps—and many readers still think so—was a scientific refutation of all social ideals that negate the life of the body. Perhaps psychoanalysis alone would suffice to decipher and redeem the irrationality of history. Though one could do worse than to pursue this hope to the end, Brown as its advocate comes to seem less and less reliable as one's concern shifts from personal catharsis to the misfortunes of classes and states. One such disillusionment, at any rate, lies behind this essay. My purpose in treating Brown at length is to show that his use of psychological theory is finally a disservice to the important cause of applied psychoanalysis. I think it is necessary to challenge the flourishing cult of Brown among scientifically impressionable humanists—those who are drawn to any set of ideas that defends poetic insight against factual positivism. When the ideas are as theoretically and empirically defective as Brown's, literary intellectuals who champion them merely reinforce their own role as innocuous traditionalists within a society that needs criticism, while psychoanalysis as a vital style of thought continues to languish in disrepute among the rest of the intellectual community.

Readers who know Brown's second ambitious book, *Love's Body,* with its elfin manner, its religious imagery and its cryptic emphasis on self-immolation and a final silence, will not need to be told that he no longer seriously purports to expound a scientific point of view. My impression, however, is that many of these readers dismiss the new book as "absolutely mad" and return to *Life Against Death* with undiminished faith in its claim to embody the Freudian outlook on history. But there is nothing mad about *Love's Body*; it has a strong internal logic, and its starting-point is the philosophy of body consciousness that was already spelled out in the final chapter of *Life Against Death.* To be sure, Brown has been spiritually on the move, but he is no less trustworthy an authority on psychoanalysis than before. For the truth is that despite Lionel Trilling's encomium on

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Life Against Death as "the best interpretation of Freud I know," Brown has always been a blithely misleading guide through the thickets of factionalism, conceptual redundancy and biological archaism that await every student of psychoanalysis. *Love's Body* may indeed be the more acceptable of the two books; because it insists on the nonliteral status of its propositions, it creates less misunderstanding about mental theory than *Life Against Death.*

In one substantial respect, however, Brown is a valuable commentator on psychoanalysis. Anyone who wants to use Freudian concepts to pose sweeping questions about mankind must face some ethical ambiguities within Freud's thought. This Brown has brilliantly done. He shows that the latent tendency of Freud's science cannot be bounded by Freud's personal stoicism and conservatism, his sardonic acquiescence in available norms; and he justly accuses many of Freud's successors of having betrayed the best psychoanalytic insight, namely that which would have discredited their peddling of culture-bound moral commonplaces under the label of objective knowledge. Psychoanalysis, as Brown shows with relentless polemical vigor, has never been able to decide whether it aims at individual therapy—i.e., conformity to the versions of tolerable unhappiness offered by a sick society—or at a social transformation that would weaken the antagonism between instinct and "reality." The confusion is not merely ethical; it extends deep into the theory itself. In its positivist mood psychoanalysis tells us that cure lies in rational mastery of what was formerly repressed: "where id was, there shall ego be." In its tragic mood it implies that sacrifices of instinct will be avenged by a resurgence from below; the most exacting sublimations will trigger the most catastrophic counterassaults by the repressed. Most importantly, Brown sees that in trying to pass muster among the quantifying, direct-observation sciences, psychoanalysis is disloyal to its own revolutionary perspective on knowledge. To a philosophical mind the chief merit of psychoanalysis is that it points a way out of the sterile Western categories of subject and object, inner and outer reality, thought and feeling, high and low motives. To have defended this possibility in the face of revisionist theory and conformist therapy is no small achievement.

Of course Brown promises much more than this. Witness the subtitle of the book he is known by: *The Psychoanalytical Meaning of History.* To follow Brown all the way is to "see history, as neurosis,

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pressing restlessly and unconsciously toward the abolition of history," unless its course can be diverted into a general regression to the body erotism that supposedly antedates the oral, anal and genital "organizations of the libido." I wish I could formulate this idea more clearly and still remain faithful to Brown's words; he seems quite earnestly to imply that history is to be redeemed by taking his advice. This, as Henry James said of Whitman's effort to identify himself with the third person of the Trinity, is tolerably egotistical. But merely to list the main steps Brown's claim requires us to make is to reduce it to absurdity. We must first agree that history can be usefully personified as a psychoanalytic patient, and we must not pause over such trifles as whether Eastern history is to be counted, whether history's case history forms a continuum across cultures and epochs and whether there is any meaningful sense in which history can be regarded as harboring repressed memories of its infantile traumas. There is no sign that these questions have crossed Brown's mind. Next, having wrestled history onto the couch, we must assume that it will be found as sick as the sickest neurotic, heading for psychosis—for Brown sides with those who deny the possibility of successful sublimation. If history sublimates, squandering its libido on would-be refinements, then history is in for a vendetta from below. And we must also believe that significant numbers of men, including the main decision-makers of the world, will find themselves capable of consciously banishing repression from their lives. This may be the trickiest step of all, for we must assent to the most inexorably pessimistic Freudian argument about man's unconscious slavery and then declare that man is free to make himself over as he pleases.

It is unsettling to realize that Brown has not only failed to allay these doubts, but has not bothered to defend his generalities through illustration. If history is a deteriorating neurosis, we would like to see how one of its phases shows a greater domination by pathological factors than another. It is true that Brown characterizes early Protestantism as "a new stage in history, a fuller return of the repressed"; but fuller than what? Without any comparative discussion of the Catholic Middle Ages he can hardly be said to have scored a point. Indeed, his lively chapter on Luther's anality, the Devil, Protestantism and Capitalism makes a case *against* his thesis, for he repeatedly complains that modern Protestants have lost the diabolism and eschatology that Luther once brought to the

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surface. He does not disguise his irritation at an epoch which is so little tormented by its unconscious conflicts that it cannot appreciate the need for a (Brownian) kingdom of grace, but he fails to notice that such an epoch falls outside his alleged dynamic of history. At the very least he might be expected to offer a crude sketch of "the repressed's" inroads between Luther's century and ours, but this too is missing.

My immediate concern is to show not that Brown's alarmism is unwarranted (maybe it isn't), but that his treatment of psychoanalysis is governed by the special requirements of his argument. The result is a subtle perversion of the whole body of Freudian theory. If that theory is germane to anything, it is to the data unearthed in clinical experience, and any adjustments in the theory are obviously to be judged on their capacity to account for the data more fully or more economically. To Brown, however, psychoanalysis is a set of paradoxical propositions about human fate—propositions which only need a little editing to be brought into alignment with his favorite tradition of mystical and dialectical thought. In a word, psychoanalysis for Brown is not science but poetic philosophy, just as its harshest critics have always said. Only on this assumption can we explain, for example, how he feels entitled to assert with breathtaking audacity that Freud was wrong to regard the sexual organizations as biologically determined. The real meaning of such a statement is that Brown has come across an obstacle to his utopianism and is wishing it away.

Much of Brown's trenchant prose looks devious in a critical rereading. His strategy in general is to imply that Freud's deepest insights can be preserved only in his own idiosyncratic and ideological formulations, which are offered as mere clarifications of the master's ambiguities. What we tend to recall from *Life Against Death* are Brown's telling jibes at intellectual timidity: the timidity of those who blind themselves to the bodily reference of symbolism, of those who shy away from Freud's instinct theory because it leads to despair, of those rival utopians who glorify one organ at the expense of the whole body, of those modern Aeolists and breech-peepers who must either call Swift mad or deny his anal obsession altogether, and thus "domesticate and housebreak this tiger of English literature." Brown is a virtuoso of cold dismissal. He begins to seem fatally vague only when we ask exactly how this analytic, Apollonian intellect of his can

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be abrogated in favor of polymorphous perversity. After several hundred pages the suspicion arises that Brown does not know what he means by the undoing of repression or the mystical body of childhood. At most we are left with a promise ("the task of judicious appraisal . . . comes later") which *Love's Body* no longer pretends to postpone, much less to honor.

Brown's handling of psychoanalytic terminology is cavalier in the extreme. He is inevitably drawn to the most dramatic—one is inclined to say melodramatic—aspect of Freudianism, the Eros-Death dualism. Freud embarrassed most of his followers by taking this dubious hunch about the properties of organic matter and using it to explain mental acts, but Freud at least recalled occasionally that this was speculation, a philosophical overlay on the observables of psychoanalysis. Brown in contrast is satisfied that a view of all life as composed of unstable fusions of Eros and Death will give maximum exercise to the spirit of paradox. On this controversy as on others, he never once deviates into petty considerations of evidence. Residual doubts are swept away with the clinching thought that all the wrong people, the anti-Freudians and the plodding therapists, reject instinctual dualism; the only reason it is omitted from psychoanalytic orthodoxy must be that it is conducive to gloom. For Brown this gloom is something to be cultivated and then dialectically overcome; by supposing that Life and Death coexist in undifferentiated unity at the animal level one can pass to the millenarian hope that "they could be reunified into some higher harmony in man." To recognize that psychoanalysis is chiefly a theory of psychic drives, structures and compromises, not a theory about the contest between two bodily energies, would be to ring the curtain on Brown's cosmic melodrama.

Brown can be relied on to celebrate those points of theory that could be turned against Freud's ideal of adult normality—*"lieben und arbeiten,"* as he once put it with his genius for brevity. Brown's rhetorical task is to reduce *lieben* to body narcissism and *arbeiten* to sheer sickness. In order to do so he must resuscitate everything in Freudian thought that has proved least acceptable to physical scientists. Thus he embraces the biologically discredited idea that organisms are constantly dedicated to tension reduction, and he willingly follows Freud into intricate applications of the Nirvana principle to the human mind; "ageless religious aspirations" look quite up to date in such terms. Similarly, he is only too eager to accept Freud's

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hydraulic idea of "stores" and "reservoirs" of sexual energy that are set to one side by the classic traumas of childhood. Such a conception can be invoked at the proper moment to belittle the possibility of nonrepressive sublimation and to accuse the sexual organizations of being needlessly parsimonious with life. Only in this perspective can Brown say that psychoanalysis regards sociability itself as a sickness—a remark which is in fact nothing more than an article of Rousseauistic ideology on Brown's part. Above all, he clings to Freud's proposals that thinking is merely a detour to a remembered (infantile) image and that only the earliest wishes yield true gratification.

Brown's ferocity toward ego psychology, with its allowance for desexualized, autonomous, adaptive functions, is a necessary corollary of this stance, as is his admiration for the most zealous and speculative of id psychologists, Sándor Ferenczi and Géza Róheim. A Lamarckian *jeu d'esprit* like Ferenczi's *Thalassa,* which biologists disregard for excellent reasons, strikes Brown as a masterpiece because it dares to psychoanalyze all living matter throughout evolutionary time, and does so in terms of the Eros-Death theory. Brown and Ferenczi alike undertake the dubious task of applying a single set of terms to the amoeba and the ego, but Ferenczi at least confesses that he is thinking in analogies. With Ferenczi and Róheim, Brown has a taste for direct and deflating reductions of "advanced" capacities to the emotional crises that may have prompted their first use in a typical life-history. The effect of such originology, as Erikson calls it, is to extend the concept of trauma across the whole domain of innate competence, as if man's unique gifts were somehow explainable as improvisations in the face of infantile disappointment. All language, says Brown, is made out of sexuality, and all thinking comes from anal erotism—that it, from a perversion of eros. "Since money breeds, the genital region is involved" in the money complex. Social organization is merely (*à la* Róheim) a collective confession of guilt. The time sense is the work of repression and nothing more. Sublimations, such as music and mathematics, are negated instincts entering consciousness under false colors. Thus Brown sweeps out of view everything but an arbitrarily simplified "natural tendency of the body" and the deepest unconscious, which is now taken to be "the 'noumenal' reality of ourselves." This inverted Transcendentalism is not the outcome of Brown's study of Freud but rather the governing theology behind that study.

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We should therefore not be too surprised, when we turn to *Love's Body,* to find that Brown has abandoned propositional argument for visionary sayings—sayings which aspire to profundity yet also to childlike freedom from literal-minded intellectualism. "Wisdom is in wit, in fooling, most excellent fooling; in play, and not in heavy puritanical seriousness. In levity, not gravity. My yoke is easy, my burden is light." Throughout *Love's Body* Brown is playing with words: punning, chasing true and false etymologies, self-consciously relaxing his rational guard. The phrases that get themselves uttered are full of surprises ("a king is an erection of the body politic") and no less full of preciosity: "the shellfishness of selfishness." Any reader of *Love's Body* will find sentences that strike him as sharply true and others that seem not to go beyond the late A. A. Brill's notorious view of poetry as a chewing and sucking of beautiful words. Like Emerson—and those who have read Brown's Columbia Phi Beta Kappa address of 1960, "Apocalypse," will remember that the identification with Emerson is deep and acknowledged—Brown now disdains transitional logic in favor of quotable, detachable sentences. As reviewers have noted, the influence of Marshall McLuhan is also prominent; like McLuhan, Brown seems to waver between scholarship and showmanship. The orphic tone, the pregnant silences, the pompous footnotes, the "empty words, corresponding to the void in things"—all have an onstage air. Bravely, Brown has tried to redeem the latent promise of *Life Against Death* and offer us polymorphous perversity epitomized in prose. However successful one may judge the effort to be, it remains an effort, a strained performance.

Brown has not altogether abandoned the rational facade of his body mysticism. One can even detect a tacit shifting from less defensible to more defensible ground, specifically from late-Freudian instinct theory to Kleinian fantasy theory. Melanie Klein's ideas about the early months of infancy are, of course, widely mistrusted, and evidence to confirm or disconfirm them is hard to come by; but they have a whole school of child analysis behind them, and in general they pose less of an outrage to scientific respectability than do Eros and Thanatos, which Brown now scarcely mentions. This is not to say, though, that he has become an empiricist. The work most frequently cited remains Ferenczi's *Thalassa,* which Brown still pretends to regard as a textbook of evolution; and he has by no means foresworn his habit of making a scrapbook of all psychoanalytic utter-

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ances that sound corroborative of his philosophy. The recourse to Kleinianism may be understood as an ingenious new attack on the reality-principle. Just as Ferenczi shrank all genitality to the pathetic "dream of uterine regression," so Melanie Klein—adopting Ferenczi's own terminology, by the way—purported to show that dealings with "Reality" are determined by fantasies, specifically by the introjection of parental figures. "Sadistic fantasies directed against the inside of [the mother's] body constitute the first and basic relation to the outside world and to reality." Thus Klein; and hence Brown: "the world is the insides of mother."

Since remarks of this sort will sound imbecilic to most readers, I want to point out that Brown values them in part for heuristic or purgative reasons. Being opposed to the idea of separate selfhood, he declares that we have fashioned our egos solely by ingesting what is past and other; the boundary between inner and outer reality is artificial, a rampart of the repressive personality. Insofar as he is undermining the common prejudice, shared in much Freudian thought, that the realm of fantasy is less real than the impinging environmental demands, Brown is making a strong point. As he puts it, "Psychoanalysis began as a further advance of civilized (scientific) objectivity; to expose remnants of primitive participation, to eliminate them; studying the world of dreams, of primitive magic, of madness, but not participating in dreams or magic, or madness. But the outcome of psychoanalysis is the discovery that magic and madness are everywhere, and dreams is what we are made of." We can recognize the hyperbole in such a statement and still find it intellectually liberating. Brown's invocation of Melanie Klein, like his use of Róheim and Ferenczi, is a refreshing means of being more Freudian than Freud; it does give us a peculiarly sharp view of Freud's ontological ambiguity and of the inadequacy of his therapeutic ethic to contain his insight into the persistence of unconscious fantasy in every phase of life.

The usual unanswerable questions arise when we try to move from Brown's attack on selfhood to his idea of salvation. Here Melanie Klein's lurid picture of the fantasy-ridden human suckling becomes an encumbrance, for exactly the reason that Freud's instinct theory was finally an encumbrance in *Life Against Death;* to the degree that the theory depicts mankind as subject to routine infantile traumas, it makes the Brownian utopia unbelievable. Having chosen to read

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psychoanalysis as tragedy, Brown finds himself obliged to rewrite the script to allow for a redemptive "conscious magic, or conscious madness." But once we have registered the Kleinian vision of everything human as governed by unconscious projections and introjections, mostly of a murderous nature, we can no longer conceive of the polymorphously narcissistic body of childhood. Brown's own sources expose the emptiness of his cry, "Down with defense mechanisms, character-armor; disarmament."

In various tacit ways Brown now acknowledges the discontinuity between his values and their supposed evidential underpinnings. He is much vaguer than before in alluding to the end of history; no sustained analysis of movements or art works is provided to match the fascinating chapters on Luther and Swift in *Life Against Death*; no longer does he systematically attack the commonsense psychological assumptions behind the social sciences. Indeed, he is no longer much concerned about the limits of acceptable psychoanalytic thought. Whereas he once sneered at "Jungian *Schwärmerei*" and quite properly characterized Jung's orientation as "flight from the problem of the body," now he uses words like "soul" and "archetype" with literary abandon, and alludes favorably to the Jungian mythographers Kerényi and Neumann. Perhaps a close reader of *Life Against Death* might have predicted this change, which is not so great if we realize that Brown's intent has been religious from the start; witness his incautious celebration of Mircea Eliade, to say nothing of Boehme and Berdyaev. It should also be mentioned that Brown's most radical pronouncements ("Work is a masturbation dream"; "All movement is phallic") are now delivered with a subdued, unpolemical air. The entire book seems almost to excuse itself as a verbal game, a self-conscious overvaluation of words. But I do not mean to say that Brown is insincere; the point is that he seems to recognize the privacy of his reflections and is content to have us keep our intellectual distance.

It is instructive to take up a psychoanalytic perspective on the most alarming aspect of *Love's Body*, its solemn and pervasive Christian language. Brown's crypto-religious declaration of independence from the Oedipus dilemma is highly suspect—is, indeed, virtually a filial confession. He rejects genital intercourse for the explicit reason that it constitutes a fantasied incest, and he identifies himself with Christ because, in his understanding, Christ is "a Son of God who is

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without a father . . . the Oedipus Complex transcended." Freud would surely have smiled at the quaint idea of erasing the Oedipus Complex by pretending to be parentless; what is it but a variant of the family romance? And Freud would not have been startled to find this self-castrating advocate of pregenitality going on to revel in the sacrificial imagery of the Cross. Much that seems bizarre in *Love's Body* makes sense in this way. If, as John Wisdom fairly well proved, Bishop Berkeley's Idealism involved an equation of matter with excrement, Norman O. Brown's wished-for "crucifixion of the self" appears to be a quixotic anti-Oedipal maneuver. "There is no way to avoid murder," he says, "except by ritual murder." Such sentences form a revealing gloss on the lyricism of polymorphous perversity; on the one hand they indicate why Brown *must* pastoralize a pre–Oedipal state; on the other hand they cast further doubt, if more is needed, on the supposed triumph over repression. A man who must comfort himself with the fantasy of being consumed in the Eucharist has not yet reentered the paradise of infancy. Is he nearer to it than *l'homme moyen sensuel*? One's mind returns to one of the earliest and most curious sentences in *Life Against Death*: "To experience Freud is to partake a second time of the forbidden fruit; and this book cannot without sinning communicate that experience to the reader." Brown's spiritual career begins to look like a passage from such sinning to ritual atonement: from rebellious Luther to annihilated Christ.

It is Brown, of course, who has most eloquently warned us against the self-righteous use of psychoanalysis as a means of concealing our own irrationality; like Swift, he invites condescension because he deals openly with, and finally fails to resolve, conflicts which the psychological cowardice of mankind would prefer to keep disguised. Again, it is Brown who has shown us the narrowness of Freud's dismissal of religion as mere wishful thinking, to be replaced by rational science. Religion and psychoanalysis both are ways of coping with the madness that threatens every human generation, and each way is affected by what it opposes. As Freud confessed, "No one who, like me, conjures up the most evil of those half-tamed demons that inhabit the human breast, and seeks to wrestle with them, can expect to come through the struggle unscathed." We may prefer psychoanalysis to religion on both intellectual and medical grounds, yet still recognize that it is unreal to demand of any thinker—even

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a psychoanalytic one—that he purge himself of theological nuances. Regardless, therefore, of the personal determinants behind Brown's eccentric form of Christianity, we might profitably ask what his books reflect about the culture we share with him.

In the broadest and simplest view we might say that Brown's appeal rests on his anti-intellectualism; perhaps no one has ever marshalled such a show of learning in behalf of an end to rational knowledge. The contradictions and non sequiturs in his argument seem unimportant to many readers, so anxious are they to believe what Brown is telling them. As men begin to articulate their feeling of slavery to the tools and the inorganic surroundings they cannot stop creating, reason itself is chosen as their scapegoat. Dispassionately considered, Brown's works ought not to strengthen this prejudice; one of his cardinal points, after all, is that unreason lies at the base of our money and production systems. Heinz Hartmann wrote in 1937 that no society has ever labored under a surfeit of intelligence; the point remains true. But in fact Brown is as anxious as anyone to indict reason along with the compulsions that act in reason's name. If few of his adherents show any skepticism toward "The Psychoanalytical Meaning of History," it is not because his vacant laws of recurrence are pondered and believed, but on the contrary because he insinuates that we needn't believe in history at all. As Hayden V. White has recently argued, *Life Against Death* is anti-history, a downgrading of the whole idea of bothering about the past. In this sense it matches the antagonism toward impersonal, chronological history shown by virtually every significant modern writer. White finds this antagonism refreshing because it opposes stale conventions of history-writing, but surely this is trivial next to the shattering thought that the Western world may be losing faith in the meaningfulness of its past. The vogue of Norman O. Brown appears to coincide with a suspicion among many literate people that man's cultural ideals have always been illusory, and hence that the accumulated bloodshed of history has been a farcical waste.

This suspicion is understandable, but it is less clear why Brown's humorless utopianism should seem different in kind from the vanities of the past. The utopias that Marx ridiculed and the one he finally advocated were less of an affront to the best knowledge of their time than is Brown's reign of body narcissism. But Brown's appeal is precisely to those whose one intellectual conviction is that they have

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been bypassed or slandered by "knowledge." Sick of ideology, unsatisfied by notions of impersonal and objective truth, violated in their selfhood by McLuhan's omnipresent electronic nervous system, many are ready to believe that social existence itself is a swindle. They are ready to toy with a new religion, but only a religion of solipsism which confines its message to a promise of perfect self-indulgence.

Here Philip Rieff's brilliant study, *The Triumph of the Therapeutic*, seems to offer the right framework for comprehending Brown's career. Western intellectuals, he says, are staging an elaborate act of suicide, an apostasy from the cause of culture to the primitive forces that culture is supposed to master. Rieff shows that unlike Freud, who saw no alternative to social restraints and was superbly reconciled to the pettiness of human fate, certain influential moderns have turned psychoanalysis to the purposes of ultimate cure—a cure for individuals that disregards or even dispenses with society as a whole. The choice of psychoanalysis seems natural in view of Rieff's formula: "faiths develop first as primary modes of release from earlier uses of faith, and then develop their own control functions." Whatever its merit as science, psychoanalysis has served as a mode of release from faith—indeed, as potentially the most anarchic release in history, since it undermines not only specific taboos but the very category of the sacred. It is to be expected that some thinkers who have lived for a while with this unnerving perspective will cast about for new certainties in the realm of instinct, and will pose these certainties in psychoanalytic language. Hence Jung, Wilhelm Reich and Lawrence, among others, celebrate the natural man and use Freudian terms to rail against the sober pessimism of Freud. Each sets his sights on redemption; each corrupts the dynamic and descriptive scheme of psychoanalysis into monism and moralism. The lost soul of modern man may yet be recovered—in orgasm, in orgone energy, in the tasteful museum of unconscious archetypes. In each case the element of social control is minimal, as befits an age demanding what Rieff calls remissive blasphemy, as opposed to the repressive piety of the past.

Norman O. Brown's case should form a revealing appendix to Rieff's analysis, for Brown is at once more reductive and more remissive than his fellow prophets. Instead of the saccharine eclecticism of Jung, who somehow managed to imply that instinct and culture were not opposed after all, Brown purports to abolish every

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trace of sublimation. His world is peopled exclusively by penises and vaginas; but since for him these are items of symbolism—since the sex act itself is symbolic, and nothing is real but imagination—it follows that man is totally unconstrained at last. The Dionysian Christ requires nothing of us, not even assent to his existence. Again, if we consider the political dimension of *Love's Body* we can see that Brown has trumped his predecessors. Reich was a Marxist, Lawrence had a streak of latent fascism and Jung welcomed Hitler in Wagnerian tones. Brown outdoes them all in one sentence: "The real prayer," he says, "is to see this world go up in flames." But then he reminds us that literal interpretations are vulgar; by making his fantasy explicit, by allowing the repressed to return uncensored, he has made it innocent of covert violence. A man who rejects hierarchy in human faculties will be against dictatorship on all levels. Polymorphous perversity seems indeed to be the acme of quietism; it requires no partner, overburdens no organ and entails no direct social consequence. One might add that it entails no discipleship to Norman O. Brown. Insofar as he has succeeded in keeping his body mysticism uncluttered by Jung's cultural trappings or the social criticism of Reich and Lawrence, he has disencumbered himself of followers who might have seen him as the champion of their grievances. In the decade of self-destroying sculpture Brown has perfected a new form, the self-abolishing movement.

With *Love's Body* Brown abandons his questionable role as historian and gives himself over to the ingenious nihilism that was lodged between the lines of *Life Against Death*. He eliminates our problems by eliminating us. Therapeutic Idealism, which has been out of favor with most intellectuals at least since the time of Mrs. Eddy, here undergoes another birth in the guise of its opposite, total desublimation. Set free from all neurotic striving, Eros politely agrees not to be a nuisance any more and retires to the domain of symbolism. Nothing remains for us to do but pluck our insipid lutes within a Oneness which is now devoid of content. The distant explosions we thought we heard—they too must be interpreted according to the spirit. And if the bombs should turn out to be real after all, and begin falling on us, they will find us in a serene attitude: passive, pre-Oedipal, androgynous.

The business of philosophy, of course, is not to make protest but to explore the nature of reality and language, and to alter or refresh

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our sense of what is important. Brown is not to be blamed for seeming indifferent to napalm and hydrogen bombs and planned epidemics; perhaps we *should* be indifferent to them, i.e., immune to their sadistic appeal. It is worth recalling that a Herman Kahn speaks "realistically" of such things yet remains their obedient slave. The war machine is not likely to be stopped by those who are obliged to think in the war machine's language. Brown at least sets up rival terms of discourse and reminds us vividly of the unconscious life that is stepped on and twisted but never quite killed by the aggressive technological mentality now reigning. He goes wrong where all primitivism does, in making a static idol of the buried life, and so turning what might have been a dynamic analysis into an ideological allegory. Instead of abolishing history for the rest of us—indeed, instead of making historical statements that are sufficiently complex to warrant trust—Brown seems headed for the ironic fate of becoming himself an episode in the history of lapsed religion. Meanwhile those who are beginning where he began, disenchanted with the old political categories and anxious to find a way out, must hope that the question of a psychoanalytic understanding of history is not yet closed.

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(Chairman Mao Tse-tung. *Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse-tung,* Foreign Languages Press [Peking, 1966], p. 47; p. 256)

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(Ralph Ellison. "An Interview with Ralph Ellison," *Harper's Magazine,* March, 1967.)

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(*New York Post,* March 24, 1967.)

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ARGUMENTS

UTOPIA/MYOPIA

David Caute

Quite a few of the twenty-six essays gathered in this collection[1] originated in *PR*. To take issue with Irving Howe in these pages is probably a hazardous enterprise for a reviewer who can measure up neither to Mr. Howe's maturity of experience nor to his extensive knowledge of American politics and society. Dangerous, but perhaps excusable. For Mr. Howe is worried about the generational gap on the American Left. Not only did the generation born in the early thirties fail to spawn its quota of radicals, but, more seriously, the Socialists who were born after World War I have failed to establish a fruitful dialogue with the New Left of the sixties. Whereas the students of SDS tend toward empathy, Camus, the "existential" approach, nonleadership and a style partly but not wholly divorced from that of the Beats, the meticulously rational Howes, Rustins and Leaguers for Industrial Democracy, Talmudic and impatient, jab at the inconsistencies of the New Left "like skilled but insensitive matadors." (The phrase is Jack Newfield's.) Mr. Howe regards the ethos of SDS, particularly its agnostic attitude toward Communism, as hopelessly woolly, while Mr. Newfield in turn complains that Mr. Howe "has not visited SDS or SNCC projects, or spent any time on McDougal Street. He writes brilliantly in the abstract, but lacks a feeling of community with the new movements because they are strangers to him."

1. *STEADY WORK: Essays in the Politics of Democratic Radicalism, 1953-1966.* By Irving Howe. Harcourt, Brace & World. $6.95.

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Mr. Howe's generation, of course, has undergone certain experiences which leave a scar. Isolated, and chewing the cud of bitter memories for too long, they have developed conceptual cramp. Their contemporaries in Europe—and here I include England—have been more fortunate. The intellectuals of the New Left in England include both graduate students and mature Communists who quit the Party after 1956 and who were prepared to reexamine theoretically their premises, rather than pass from one tight-lipped sect to another. In France, as in England, these students know about Hegel and Marx, Weber and Gramsci, Trotsky and Bukharin, Malraux and Silone. They have some sense of history. They have a keener regard for Sartre, or Althusser or even Russell, than for Antoine, Ginsberg and Bob Dylan. The Aldermarston marches were conspicuous for their happy flowing together of the generations; if the fathers and mothers in mackintoshes and sensible shoes were uneasy about the beards and guitars of the young, the disagreement was purely tactical. This fundamental community of aims saved the children from iconoclasm and the parents from a dehydrating nostalgia for old wars fought and lost.

In making this contrast between Europe and America, I am not denying that Mr. Howe is always interesting and often brilliant. To read him is to be rewarded. As a political commentator he is humane, sensible, self-examining and apparently anxious not to wall himself off in a small cell of virtue and revealed truth. Fully aware that the European Social Democrats eventually became what they had once aspired to change, he sets down his general program for immediate action without ambiguity or equivocation.

As a practical man, Mr. Howe is committed to the coalition approach, to an empirical working alliance of labor, Negroes, liberals, Church groups and students striving for the perpetual extension of an open-ended welfare state. This vision implies not only an increase of distributive benefits but also an extension of participatory democracy. His ends are as cautious and pragmatic as his means: in the economic sphere, the abolition of private property in the basic industries meets most, if not all, of his requirements. The trend is clear, the dangers obvious. Even if we hold in check certain quasi-automatic reflexes, the flow of damning labels which objectify this position as petit bourgeois and revisionist, we can hardly turn a blind eye to the lessons of recent Social Democratic history, lessons written not in blood but in water. It is fine for Mr. Howe to champion Crossman against Crosland, but it would be instructive, also, to consider what Wilson has made of them

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both. Delicate nuances of emphasis and proposal are notoriously vulnerable to the process of coalition and practical compromise which Mr. Howe embraces. One senses that his brilliant demolitions of Kennedy and Stevenson carry more conviction than his essay on Trotsky largely because American liberals and Social Democrats are now operating on the opposite faces of a single coin. And this coin is wearing thin.

It is not for me to play host to Mr. Howe in Harlem or in Amite County. Even so, Mr. Newfield has a point. Dismissing LeRoi Jones's behavior as "racist buffoonery," Mr. Howe goes on to endorse George Dennison's verdict of the Negro playwright: "Just as he mis-labels the victims *black,* he mis-labels the authority *white.*" Were he less of an ignorant buffoon, Jones would evidently appreciate that "the life-destroying evil inheres in the nature of the authority, not in the color of those who wield it." This authority is one "of property and arms." Brilliant as this leap into dialectical space may be, it unfortunately remains one which middle-class white Socialists are better equipped to make than are the Negroes of Amite County, Harlem, Watts, Chicago, North London, South Africa, Angola and Southern Rhodesia. Mr. Howe has read Frantz Fanon and not liked him much; but Fanon did at least show that the white liberal mind and imagination have a long journey to make.

Mr. Howe compares young Negro desperadoes in contemporary America to the late nineteenth-century Russian terrorists "who also tried to substitute their intransigent will for the sluggishness of history." There is, perhaps, a difference: the Narodniks were committed to the peasants, whereas the Negroes are committed to themselves. In the present century, Russian, Chinese, Yugoslav, Cuban and Vietnamese peasants and workers, also committed to themselves, have revealed a poor respect for the sluggishness of history, and with surprising results for the slug. Slave peoples create unexpected gods, but I doubt whether Fabius will ever figure among them.

To this Mr. Howe has a forceful answer, reiterated throughout this volume, particularly in "Leon Trotsky: The Costs of History," "Isaac Deutscher: Freedom and the Ash Can of History," "Communism Now" and "Authoritarians of the Left." The answer is implicit in the titles. With regard to violent revolution, Stalinism and the one-party state, he has forgotten nothing and forgiven little. Behind Fanon, Lumumba and Castro he sees lurking famous ghosts. Fanon's suggested system for an emerging society he condemns as one in which "the masses of the people act out a charade of involvement but are denied the reality of decision."

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(Interchange the words "involvement" and "decision," and then look nearer home.) In his approach to Africa and Asia, Mr. Howe seems oblivious to the economic, social and tribal realities of these continents. It is not necessary to endorse automatically every form of leftist elitism and dictatorship in the name of local realities, but it does seem important to scratch below the surface, to discard an absolute fetishism of parties and nominal pluralities and to put in cold storage the conceptual equipment which permits Mr. Howe to describe India as a country with "a solid democratic tradition."

Mr. Howe's humanitarian mind and imagination travel more easily in some directions than in others. One can only sympathize with his strictures against those "left authoritarians" who justify Soviet socialism by reference to the victory of 1945 over Germany, or glibly explain away the cruel sufferings of millions in the name of industrial expansion. But his credentials as an advocate for the Ivans of Stalin's camps would appear more solidly based did he not describe the English industrial revolution—in the course of which not one but three or four generations sweated their guts out in conditions of appalling poverty and degradation—as a process "accompanied by a rich social history in which a vast growth of human awareness took place." But rich *for whom*? Mr. Howe's answer is perfectly clear. "Imagine," he writes, "what a Dickens could do for and to present-day Russia."

Irving Howe

"Rich *for whom?*" asks Mr. Caute in response to my remark that the industrial revolution in England was "accompanied by a rich social history in which a vast growth of human awareness took place." I rub my eyes: is this man serious? But in any case, the answer is, "Rich for the English working class and eventually the whole culture."

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The growth of democracy in nineteenth-century England is notably a consequence of social (class) struggle: labor insurgency together with reform movements among intellectuals and middle-class people. In turn, this social struggle is enabled by the growth of democracy. A "rich social history" signifies the ways in which an oppressed class defines itself through conflict, thereby gaining power and confidence: Chartism, the chapel, trade unions, the Labour Party, etc. Also: the Reform Bills, Dickens, Mill and liberal socialism, George Eliot and the religion of humanity, indeed, the whole tradition of sociocultural criticism described in Raymond Williams' *Culture and Society*. This profoundly liberating complex of developments stands in sharp contrast to the faceless and static anomie of social life under the Communist dictatorships; and that, Mr. Caute, is one reason socialists place so heavy a stress upon the "absolute fetishism of parties and nominal pluralities" (how dismal an echo that sneering phrase of his sounds, quite as if we were right back in the wretched days of "social fascism!").

The experience and conquests—the experience of solidarity in a strike, the conquest of political independence—which the English working class won for itself is today, after decades of what Mr. Caute delicately calls "Soviet socialism," still denied to the Russian people. In respect to class activity (to say nothing of political and intellectual freedom) the workers in the Communist countries are still behind the English workers of a century ago, for they have not yet won for themselves or been allowed by their societies the most elementary political and social rights.

That is why I am indeed quite "solidly based" when speaking in behalf of the Russian Ivans; I speak in the language of such "revisionists" as Djilas, Kolakowski and Tertz. I want those Ivans to have the same liberties and powers that their brothers in the West have wrested for themselves—even while I am quite ready to say that in the West those liberties are often unused and those powers often misused. Democracy is not a sufficient condition for socialism or the good society, but it is a necessary one; and without it, there can only occur a self-alienating elitist manipulation of the masses in the name of "history" or "industrial development" or "the revolutionary vanguard." On this score Mr. Caute is right in saying I have forgotten nothing: it is a lesson, Mr. Caute, that has been paid for with the agony and blood of generations. And in any case I am confident, these days, that when it comes to forgetting there will be no lack of candidates.

Similar considerations apply to the underdeveloped countries. It

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scarcely requires Mr. Caute to tell us that these are not exactly ideal settings for stable democracies. (By the same token, enthusiasts for "Third World revolution" might notice, these countries are not exactly ideal settings for socialism either.) What urgently matters in such countries is that, in order to achieve not only a modernized economy but a humane order of life, there be at least some social space, some political rights for the competing groups and classes. Do workers in such countries want to establish unions independent of the state bureaucracy? Do peasants want to protest against exploitation? Do intellectuals want to criticize demagogy and corruption? For these elementary purposes, they need a measure of democratic rights. Not some abstract Western ideology but a conviction that for the people in these countries to gain a better life they must have such political rights motivates the socialist critique of "left authoritarianism."

Hence, my concern with India. Mr. Caute would put in cold storage my view that India has "a solid democratic tradition." Let him hesitate a little. I did not say that democracy was the only tradition at work in India, or that it was beyond criticism or improvement. Look, however, at the recent election in India where, with a minimum of disorder, the dominant party was dislodged in several major states; and then compare this to the recent happenings in China. Isn't there some reason to admire the Indian people who, despite the most painful circumstances, have maintained a democratic society these past twenty years? If Western intellectuals were not so bemused—and some of them, corrupted—by *Realpolitik* on the one hand and a sodden nostalgia for the rhetoric of "revolution" on the other, they would recognize that the survival of Indian democracy merits our respect. That there are grave criticisms to be made of India is obvious, but the remarkable thing is that these criticisms can be made freely *within* India.

Steadily, the "left authoritarians" have had to beat a retreat. Russia no longer attracts them; Yugoslavia is too liberal and even, perish the thought, social democratic; China, well that is a bit thick, you know. What remains for such people—largely contemptuous of the fraternal vision at the heart of Marxism but still captive to the melodrama of "revolution"; no longer, if ever, devoted to the proletarian mystique but still enticed by the schema of a vanguard party's seizure of power —is an *idea* of the Third World which proves more and more to be without historical or geographical location. For as the countries of Asia and Africa go further along their increasingly complex and divergent lines of development, and as we brush past the slogans of ideological

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debauch, it becomes clear that there is not going to be one great "revolution of the underdeveloped world" leading to one-party nationalist-radical dictatorships and/or Communist-style expropriations of the land. Some countries will go that way; others will stumble along with military regimes; still others will try to break into the twentieth century through democratic or semi-democratic experiments.

What the recent experiences in Indonesia, Ghana, Algeria and elsewhere demonstrate is that the problem of modernization cannot be solved simply through a forced march to industrialization—often no more than mere political display. Modernization also requires that certain values and disciplines, habits of voluntary cooperation, be inculcated. Toward these ends, at least a measure of democracy may turn out to be more valuable, if less "dramatic," than the compulsions of the party-state dictatorship.

Between the suppression of democratic rights and the rationale for such acts offered by either indigenous dictators or Western intellectuals (e.g., industrial development, cultural backwardness, etc.) there is often a large distance, sometimes a complete lack of connection. Such justifications tend to be *post hoc,* large rhetorical flourishes ill-related to particular repressive steps. What in actuality did the suppression of democratic rights by Nkrumah or Sukarno or Castro have to do with the grandiose economic claims they made for themselves or that were prepared by Western intellectuals who know that to make omelets someone's eggs have to be broken? (There's also a strand of social snobbism in the "left authoritarian" outlook: democracy is all very well for England, but really now, those *natives.* . . .)

If, indeed, we were to conclude that in some backward countries there is for a time no alternative to authoritarianism, there would be no reason for intellectuals, especially those of "the Left," to praise such regimes or set up their charismatic leaders as models for dissident youth in the West. As George Lichtheim pungently remarks: ". . . while the ruling groups of certain pre-industrial countries may derive an advantage from pinning the socialist label to themselves, they are not in fact promoting anything connected with the historic aims of either democracy or the labor movement."

Mr. Caute's opinions about American politics need not long detain us. Yes, Leroi Jones is a racist demagogue whose bluster, if heeded, would lead not to militant struggle by the Negro masses but to isolation, demoralization and copping-out. Yes, "delicate nuances" are imperiled by the politics of coalition; can Mr. Caute tell us of any politics, short of

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the hermetic life of a sect, about which that is not true? And for Mr. Caute to write that my political ends are "cautious" and then offer as evidence my desire to abolish private property "in the basic industries" —this is really low comedy, a resurrection of infantile leftism.

Dr. Johnson once said about Richardson's Clarissa that there was always something that mattered to her more than her virtue. A similar observation might be made about the attitude many "new leftists" take toward liberty. To be sure, they dislike Stalin's dictatorship and deplore authoritarian regimes; *but* . . . and then out it spills. The line of division is clear, it has nothing to do with personal qualities, and it is a piece of home-brewed sociology to reduce the matter to a split between generations. The line of division concerns one's attitude toward liberty.

The society in which we live urgently needs the most scathing, fundamental and serious social criticism. But only that criticism merits our support which emerges unambiguously from a devotion to political liberty.

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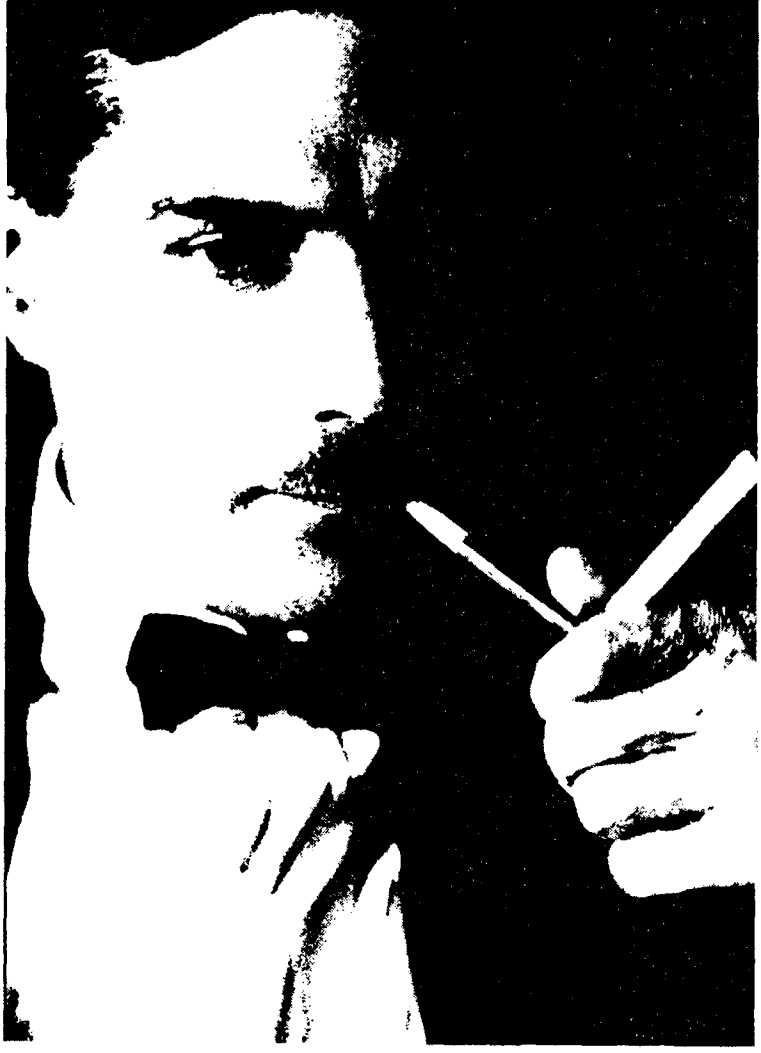

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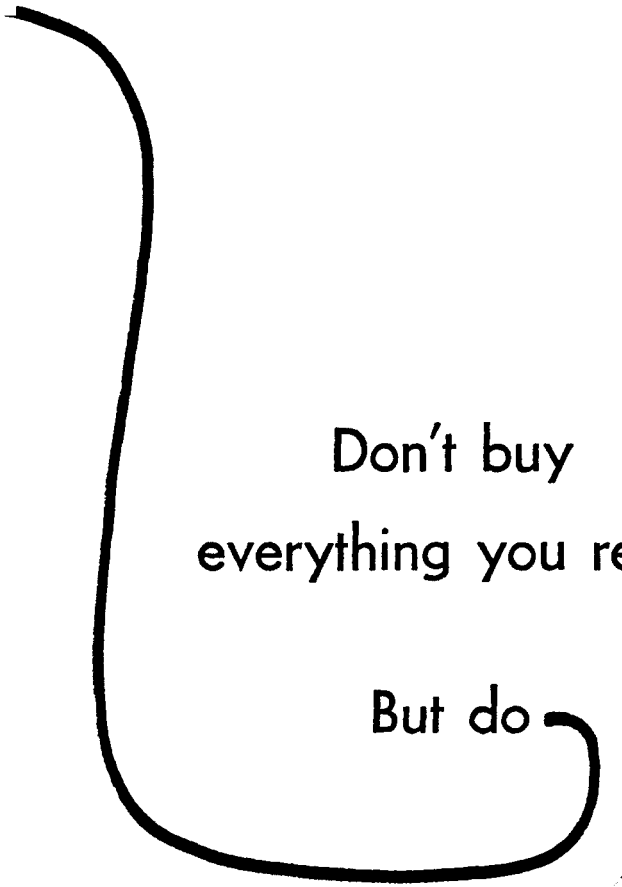

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BOOKS

"...QUINE/IS JUST FINE"

SELECTED LOGIC PAPERS. By W. V. Quine. Random House. $6.95.

THE WAYS OF PARADOX AND OTHER ESSAYS. By W. V. Quine. Random House. $6.95.

John Langshaw Austin, whose death in 1960 placed him alongside Wittgenstein in the pantheon of ordinary-language philosophy, used to write clerihews about other philosophers. About Quine he wrote:

Everything done by Quine
Is just fine.
All we want is to be left alone
To fossick around on our own.

As an admission of Quine's importance in contemporary philosophy this can only be called grudging; what it amounts to is that he is important enough to be a nuisance to ordinary-language philosophers. Quine spent a year at Oxford in 1953-54 as George Eastman Visiting Professor, and the year was, as he puts it, "kicked off" by the publication in *Mind* of his review of Peter Strawson's *Introduction to Logical Theory,* a review in which he takes ordinary-language philosophy to task for supposing that it can explain what logicians are trying (and failing) to do. The review, along with twenty other papers, is reprinted in *Ways of Paradox,* the metalogical member of this pair of books, and by all odds the more interesting and accessible of the two for the average reader. It is a significant pointer for anyone who wants to understand the leading motives of his work.

As this episode shows, Quine is not above being polemical; but it would be a mistake to think of him as mainly concerned with polemics or even with doctrine. An empiricist by his own admission (see his essay, "Two Dogmas of Empiricism," in *From a Logical Point of View*), he is nevertheless difficult to place for people who depend on movements, affinities and other such pigeonholing devices for their understanding of the philosophical scene. Quinton calls him "the most distinguished American recruit to logical empiricism," an odd clas-

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sification of a man who studied under Whitehead and has taken pains to reject the two cardinal beliefs of the logical empiricists, namely the analytic-synthetic distinction and phenomenalist reductionism (but then later in the same review he is said to have "constructed single-handed . . . a position which has some general affinities with the absolute idealism of F. H. Bradley"). The reason for this intractability in classification is, I think, just that Quine has got on with his own work, engaging in controversy only when provoked, and then not so much in the role of an advocate as in that of an expert. What he is expert in is, of course, logic, but empiricist logicians are not necessarily logical empiricists.

What these books offer is a view of the expert at work. *Selected Logic Papers* shows him actually doing logic; *The Ways of Paradox* shows him reflecting on the consequences of having done it. The great thing about logic, as about any discipline in which there is a recognized expertise with categorical judgments of success and failure, is that for the most part there is no ambiguity about the task, and one can concentrate attention on the mastery and precision with which it is carried out. ("I have omitted an appendix," says Quine of one of the *Selected Papers,* "because, as Church showed me, it was wrong.") Not that every problem in logic is straightforward—on the contrary; but once taken, each step appears simple and "logical," as that term has come to be understood in ordinary language. The technical papers are of course full of technical terminology, so that they look to the untrained and easily intimidated eye like a series of frightful complexities. To do logic at any advanced level does indeed call for skill in handling complexity, since a great deal hinges on which simple step to take next, from which of the premises in hand, and so on. To understand it when done is a different matter, and I am quite sure that what prevents many people from understanding logic (apart from the psychological block which may be induced by the symbolism itself) is not at all that it is too complex, but that it is too simple.

Consider for example a derivation given by Quine in his paper "A Method of Generating Part of Arithmetic Without Use of Intuitive Logic"—a paper to be recommended to the neophyte because it requires no knowledge of any algebraic operation except subtraction. At a very early point it is required to move from the premise

$$x = x - (y - y),$$

by means of the rule

Given $a = \beta$, put a for β anywhere,

to the identity

$$x = x.$$

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As anybody who has taught logic knows, this kind of simple move can drive otherwise intelligent people to panic. The argument runs as follows: *if* x is equal to $x - (y - y)$, as the premise asserts, then it can be substituted for $x - (y - y)$ wherever that expression occurs, according to the rule. The expression occurs on the right hand side of the premise itself; substituting x for it there yields the required identity. But why, the bewildered reader asks, prove that $x = x$? Isn't it obvious?—certainly more so than $x = x - (y - y)$? And to this the only answer is that we have left the domain in which the luxury of the ordinary-language "obvious" can be indulged. Now we are doing logic, and we follow the rules, one step at a time. For most people this requires a real effort at simplemindedness, a kind of heroic return to innocence, and this may be the reason why otherwise simpleminded men are sometimes so good at logic.

Quine, however, cannot be counted in this group. He can be simple when the business in hand requires it, either because of the stepwise character of the work itself or because of the need for lucid exposition, but when it is a question of the place of logic in philosophy, or of the strategy for achieving certain logical ends or of the implications for human understanding of results arrived at in logic, he is capable of as much philosophical complexity as the ordinary-language philosophers themselves. The point is to understand what logic is about, when doing it to do it rigorously, and when doing something else to know what *that* is about and how it is appropriately to be done. Logic does not exist for the better formulation of ordinary locutions like "every," "all," "if . . . , then . . ."; it substitutes its own locutions for these in certain specialized uses, for example, those of mathematics and science, with a view to "maximizing algorithmic facility" (to return to the review of Strawson from which we started). The whole apparatus is to be judged in terms of its success in coping with experience; even the most fundamental logical laws are not to be considered sacrosanct, although their great generality does confer on them a kind of privilege, so that it is hard to imagine the kind of empirical revelation that would make us abandon them.

The development of the technical apparatus of logic has uncovered some surprising difficulties in the symbolic formulation of truth, difficulties which might never have emerged from discussion in ordinary language. The most celebrated of these are the incompleteness proof, due to Gödel, and a series of paradoxes starting with Russell's. These form the subject of the title essay of *The Ways of Paradox*, in which, of all the papers collected here, Quine's clarity and patience in exposition

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show to their best advantage. It is a superb review of some of the most significant results of this century in one of the few fields of philosophy where hard results have been forthcoming. Not that the success of logic need be considered to downgrade any other part of philosophy, ordinary-language analysis included; it is just that Austin's protest cuts both ways. And it is well for logicians to remember that their own work is embedded in ordinary language and common sense.

As far as that goes, Quine himself is not averse to common sense even as a tool in logic. One of the popular paradoxes which recurs in the literature (most recently in *Mind,* January, 1967) is that of the Unexpected Execution. The judge announces to the prisoner on Sunday that at noon on some day in the following week he will be hanged, but that he will not know on the fatal morning whether or not his last day has come. The prisoner argues that if he is still alive on Saturday morning he will know he is to be executed that day, since it is the last possibility; but that violates the second condition, so he eliminates Saturday. Once Saturday is out, a similar argument disposes of Friday, and so on back through the week. The prisoner congratulates himself at having caught the judge in an inconsistency, but when the hangman arrives on Thursday he is surprised after all and the judge is vindicated. Quine's solution to this paradox is to point out, in effect, that so far as the prisoner knows the judge might have been bluffing all along; the prisoner's uncertainty extends to the question whether he will be hanged at all, and *a fortiori* to the question whether it will be on a given day. It is clear from this that logic is not a guide to life, but then Quine has never maintained that it was. It is a powerful adjunct to empirical inquiry, whose proper use requires prior discipline; its virtue lies in the fact that if we supply it with truth, it will never yield falsehood. Few men have shown the manner of its use with more authority.

Peter Caws

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THE OLD COUNTRY

THE FIXER. By Bernard Malamud. Farrar, Straus & Giroux. $5.75.

The Fixer seems to me a strikingly uneven book. At its best it does manage to impart a sense of foreboding, it does contain passages of a despairing claustrophobic intensity, which one feels to be a true expression of the moral and historical burden of the novel. But these effects are achieved only at intervals; and when *The Fixer* is not at a high level it falls to a disappointingly low one: it is clumsy in technique and uncertain in tone. Moreover, the faults of the book are not of a kind which one can easily set aside as one reads.

I assume that there are very few readers who do not know by now that the novel describes the arrest and imprisonment of a Jewish handyman, Yakov Bok, on suspicion of having murdered a Gentile boy for ritual purposes, in the town of Kiev shortly before World War I. The book is based on the notorious Beiliss "blood libel" affair, some of the factual details of which it follows fairly closely. But *The Fixer* is wholly intended to be read as a novel, as a work of the imagination. The sudden, total destruction of Yakov's hopes of living as a man entitled to make his own choices (even the choice as to whether or not he should be a Jew); his solitary confinement within the few square feet of a bare, damp, stinking cell; his incredulity at the nature of the charge laid against him; his despair of being able to find any explanation for or meaning in his sufferings; his hallucinations and moments of frenzy; his stubborn, inarticulate refusal to "confess" and thus to betray himself and incriminate his people: all these are rendered from within, often with great power and immediacy. Throughout the book, which covers a period of more than two years, we are shown only what takes place in Yakov's presence or inside his skull; and once he has been arrested, this close, unrelenting constriction of view affects the reader as in itself a type of imprisonment, a paradigm of the actual subject of the book. (I would add that the fact that Yakov is often so close to being driven out of his mind enables Malamud to make a dramatically appropriate use of his gift for fantasy and abstraction.) The trouble is, however, that the congruity between the narrative form and this particular theme is radically at odds with Malamud's evident ambition to make us feel within the novel the movement and power of the vast stream of modern his-

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tory in which Yakov Bok is merely one man caught up by chance, as anyone might be, as millions of other, equally innocent Jews were to be caught up by it later.

The problem of maintaining our sense of entrapped closeness to Yakov and yet of giving some kind of dramatic weight and effectiveness to all that is outside him is one that the author only occasionally manages to solve. "Russia" and "history" are invoked in the novel; but neither concept is given any imaginative reality by the various characters who deliver lectures to Yakov on aspects of his own and the general situation which he himself cannot know about, or—even more damagingly—give him information which he must have known perfectly well but which the author fears the reader will be ignorant of. Thus we have one Jew who tells Yakov what is the meaning of the term "Pale"; and another explains to him just who the Black Hundreds are, how the Tsarist regime uses them and how they "gnaw like rats to destroy the independence of the courts, the liberal press, and the prestige of the Duma." The tremendous reservoirs of Russian anti-Semitism have to be indicated, early in the book, through the diatribe of an obligingly talkative and horrible boatman whom Yakov meets on his way to Kiev; and altogether there is a strong tendency for the lesser characters to be reduced to their functions as representatives and explainers of the forces at work within the society at large.

Awkwardness and thinness of this kind might matter less if they were not associated with the author's heavy reliance on "charm," particularly in the early stages of the book, to do rather too much of the work of evocation and characterization. It is the sort of charm that is inclined to slide over easily into a modest, throwaway pretentiousness; and one is sorry to see Malamud's wonderful turn of phrase being used in this way. "[His tea] tasted bitter and he blamed existence." Or this, shortly after Yakov's arrival in the city:

> Kiev stood on three hills, and he remembered his first trembling sight of the city from the Nicholas Bridge—dotted with white houses with green roofs, churches and monasteries, their gold and silver domes floating above the green foliage. He wasn't without an eye for a pretty scene, though that added nothing to his living. Still, a man was more than a workhorse, or so they said.

In that extract we can see how the author's doubt about his capacity to present the external scene, his anxiety to keep the novel confined within

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Yakov's perceptions, and his determination that the reader should find Yakov sympathetic all lead him to his unnecessary, ingratiating, "philosophical" conclusion.

The Fixer is a very ambitious novel, highly accomplished in many ways, and written in a style which is entirely the author's own; sections of it are harrowing to read. Yet one can't help feeling that having been bold enough to go so far back in time, and such a distance from the surroundings he knows best, the author should have trusted his own great talent more, and taken still greater risks with his people and their setting. I have said that Yakov's imprisonment becomes the reader's. The novelist himself should have contrived to remain a free man.

Dan Jacobson

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THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS

A WILDERNESS OF MIRRORS. By Max Frisch. (Translated by Michael Bullock.) Random House. $6.00.

I Am Not Stiller, the best-known of Max Frisch's four novels, is prefaced by two quotes from Kierkegaard that read like succinct summaries of the problems Frisch has written about throughout his work: "Look, that is why it is so difficult to choose oneself, because in this choice absolute isolation is identical with the deepest continuity, because this choice eliminates any chance to become someone else, or rather, to transform oneself into something else." And: "As the passion for freedom awakes in him (and it awakes in the very choice and is a prerequisite of the act of choosing) he chooses himself and fights for this possession as for his blessing, and that is his blessing." Indeed, Stiller's blessing consists entirely of his assertion of the freedom to be himself; conversely, of his violent denial of being what others insist he was and is. Stiller's decision is existential and abstract, and the more problematical for not involving a commitment to something outside himself. Moreover, Frisch's existential hero refuses to make himself a new self after having sloughed off the old one, since doing so would immediately curtail his freedom. He exists in a state of vacuous freedom and flux; his passion is to be absolutely free and unnamable. But by emphasizing these purely negative ramifications of Stiller's choice, by making the passion for freedom indistinguishable from an irrational reaction, by making Stiller's choice of himself synonomous with the possession of nothingness, Frisch so weakens his protagonist's position as to make his eventual capitulation to the status quo both inevitable and comprehensible. The stages of Stiller's revolt and submission parallel the vicarious and purposeless revolt of and eventual submissiveness of middle-class youth, particularly in Germany.

Two of the possibilities inherent in the choice as described by Kierkegaard are fanaticism and madness. Theological and psychological implications overlap. Frisch is as fearful of these consequences as the bourgoisie has been traditionally afraid of genuine revolutions. In *Stiller,* therefore, Frisch merely demonstrates the desire for and impossibility of the identity revolution.

Whereas the psychological drama of Stiller is wrenched into a most improbable realistic arrest and investigation framework, an instance of the difficulties novelists can have with protagonists whose inner life overwhelms plot and environment and in fact exists in an abstract and

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timeless philosophical realm, Frisch in his latest novel internalizes the quest for identity completely. The never ending cycle of the assertion and destruction of egos, the state of permanent flux, becomes the activity of the novel itself.

"A man has been through an experience, now he is looking for the story to go with it—you can't live with an experience that remains without a story and I often used to imagine that someone had exactly the story to fit my experience." The narrator of *A Wilderness of Mirrors* "tries on stories like clothes," as "sketches for an ego." Since to find the story which fits properly would mean he must commit himself to a single ego, to isolation and deep continuity, as it were, the one true story behind the various imagined ones (the identity behind the conflicting fragments) is intimated to us through the organized disarray and so assumes the vague outlines of an Everyman. The various roles the narrator tries on contain implicit comments on each other's unsuitability; the futility of the endeavor to find the one true story is parodied throughout.

At first it appears that *A Wilderness of Mirrors,* like so many novels written in German during the fifties and early sixties (Johannes Bobrowski's *Levin's Mill* would be a good example), derives its artistic strength from its emphasis on the narrative element as a device used at the writer's discretion for critical purposes or for maneuvers designed to countervene empathy. But that is not the case here. The breaks in the narrative do not suspend the reader's perhaps too eager belief in the story, since the stories are admittedly false to begin with and obviate the need for disruption of empathy. The breaks do not reflect on anything outside the book, but only back upon the narrator himself. Brecht's estrangement technique, to which Frisch has admitted being deeply attracted, devoid of Brecht's overt didactic purposes, turns into an artistic device per se. As a completely internalized psychological drama, *A Wilderness of Mirrors* also lacks the tension that marks, for example, H. E. Nossack's *The Impossible Proof*, a novel of insomnia which represents one of the most brilliant formulations and critiques of the split between a conservative existence and the utterly nihilistic view of life on which such an existence bases itself. *A Wilderness of Mirrors* lacks tension because there is nothing at stake. What matters to the narrator is the very process of trying on roles, of trying them out on himself.

That is what has become of the very act of choosing himself; trying on stories, a moderate blessing. In his diary (*Tagebuch 1946-49*, a beautiful and interesting document of that period) Frisch offers us an explanation for the insufficiency of stories: "For truth is not a story.

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All stories are invented. Games of the imagination. Every person, even if he is not a writer, invents his own story. The one and the same incident serves a thousand experiences." That then is what becomes of the unending circle of the assertion and destruction of egos. It dissolves in the flux of an artistically imagined series of roles.

In his essay on Leskov, Walter Benjamin described the growth process of fables by saying that "Ennui [the German *Langeweile* connotes both boredom as well as an extended period of time organized in natural cycles; hand-weaving Benjamin felt was analogous] is the dream-bird that hatches the egg of experience." Frisch's novel belongs to the very opposite tradition, the individualistic novel in the advertising age: fragmentation, disruption of time, misgivings about the nature and capacity of the imagination and the very perceptions in which the imagination has to trust to be able to function creatively; a spectrum of identities which all hint at the presumed, longed-for, but nonetheless distrusted whole self, which appears to be unidentifiable yet whose most vigorous characteristic is its unfettered craving for self-consciousness. But, in the same way as it only adopts the manner of an effective contemporary narrative technique, the novel only toys with the more dangerous implications of its subject.

This comes out most clearly in the role the narrator prefers to that of any other, the role of Gantenbein (a translation of the German title would read: "My Name be Gantenbein"). Gantenbein wears blind man's glasses though he is not blind, in his marriage assumes the role of the wife though he is not homosexual, through his dark lenses sees the violet-colored emptiness around him; but, since he knows he is merely playing a role and is but an empty shell himself, he feels no need to step out of his role or act on the basis of what he sees. It is clearly futile to do so. As the narrator puts his favorite daydream character through his paces—the narrator tests Gantenbein in every standard human situation—he proves to Gantenbein, and himself, how disastrous the consequences are when Gantenbein does leave his role. The role to which Gantenbein is married thus becomes his fate.

This view is pessimistic and self-indulgent in the extreme, which may be the ultimate consequence of an abstract and negative quest for an identity and absolute freedom as it is described so forcefully in *Stiller*. The divorce of imagination from outward existence is completed. A civilized existence protects a richly developed inwardness, a phantom world of suppressed longing.

Michael Roloff

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BLACK SKIN, WHITE MASKS

POUR LA REVOLUTION AFRICAINE. By Frantz Fanon. Maspero. 13,50 F.

In the introduction to *The Politics of Experience and The Bird of Paradise,* the British psychoanalyst R. D. Laing writes that "the requirement of the present, the failure of the past, is the same: to provide a thoroughly self-conscious and self-critical human account of man." The same goal motivated Frantz Fanon, the Martiniquean psychiatrist who became a revolutionary during the Algerian war, and whose writings have come to symbolize the awakening of the damned of the earth.

At the end of this year the third of Fanon's four books, *Towards an African Revolution,* will appear in an English translation. To date Fanon has been welcomed by Marxists, exponents of Black Power, revolutionaries in search of a leader and disenchanted intellectuals with a masochistic bent. His writings have aroused professional historians of colonization, experts on North Africa and African history and the articulate members of the liberal establishment. But Fanon was not a Marxist, he was critical of the African version of Black Power, *négritude,* and he was in no sense the leader of a movement. As for professional historians and intellectuals, he had a broad disdain for what he considered their hypocrisy and distortion of the truth. His power, such as it is, derived less from the position he occupied than from the irresistible combination of his passion for truth and his talent for expressing what is politically relevant. Fanon was not a party man. He was anarchic without being an anarchist. He was a partisan of freedom developed through individual and collective self-knowledge. He was a political ideologue devoted to the cause of demystification; an advocate of the intolerance of immorality and deceit. He was a psychiatrist who abandoned his profession in despair of the world to which he was adjusting his patients. He was a Negro who discovered his identity in a world from which he was excluded. He was a humanist who advocated the pure cathartic of violence; a condemned man with a passion for life. But he had the ability to temper the insufferable demands of his own passions with the cool and constant perspective of a political analyst recording the barometric pressures of an incomprehending world.

The Wretched of the Earth was the last work written before Fanon's death in 1961. It completed a dialogue he had begun nine years earlier with the publication of his autobiographical essay, *Peau Noire, Masques Blancs.* There, at the age of twenty-eight, he traced the experiences and

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the men who had made the greatest impression on his life. He chronicled the events of his youth in Martinique, the impact of French troops landing in wartime, the subtle prejudice of the West Indian against the African and the shock of feeling himself treated as inferior by the French. He acknowledged the debt he owed to Hegel, Freud and Sartre; and he demonstrated the relevance of Sartre's essay on the Jewish question to the Negro and colonial issues. Fanon's ability to question himself, and his talent to understand the broader dimensions of his personal quest led him to expand the basis of his explanation from the biographical to the social level. From the psychology of his own soul he turned to a psychological study of the society around him; a society that he experienced as based on inequality, myth and injustice.

In 1953, having completed his medical training in France, he accepted a position as psychiatrist in Blida, Algeria. The move was critical. Within three years of his appointment, the pressures of Franco-Algerian coexistence proved too much. The choice had to be made, and Fanon abandoned France and the French medical service as he felt it had abandoned him, the Algerians and the entire world of the underdeveloped colonies. The Algerian war made Fanon a revolutionary; it transformed him into a theoretician of violence. *Studies in a Dying Colonialism* was Fanon's analysis of France in Algeria. It was a ruthless exploration of the substructure of Franco-Arab relations and the apparent inability of the two to communicate in peace or war. In 1956 Fanon joined forces with the National Liberation Front (FLN) of the Algerian Revolution, acting as occasional ambassador at large to other African countries and as political essayist for *el-Moudjahid.*

The essays written for the FLN publication, *el-Moudjahid,* constitute the bulk of *Towards an African Revolution.* They focus on the events of the Algerian war, the anatomy of racism, the myth of colonization and the alleged hypocrisy of the French Left in its complicated dealings with the Algerian revolutionaries. Fanon's ties with the journalists and intellectuals of Paris who supported the Algerians were strong but tinged with ironic criticism. The logic of the Revolution, if not of revolution, forced the drawing of clear boundaries between the colonizer and the colonized. It prohibited the ambiguities that peace or equality might have allowed. It required terrorism when anything less proved futile and it required retaliation when torture was applied from the Capital. The issue of terrorism, of violence in the service of justice, divided Fanon from his French counterparts who demanded less blood more cautiously spilled.

Algeria also provided Fanon with the raw material of a powerful

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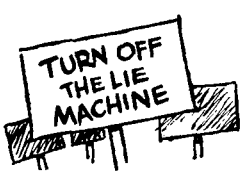
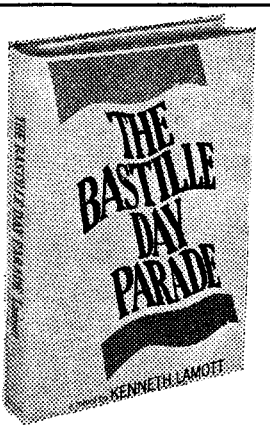
mythology of his own. In the tradition of Robespierre and Rousseau, the eulogy of the people and its unalterable will colored his more sober evaluations of peasant activities. For Fanon, and, he believed, for Africa, the Algerian Revolution came to symbolize the right of a people to its national existence. It inaugurated nothing less than the reign of justice and the defeat of racism and the exploitation of man. With his discovery of the rural masses of Algeria and Africa, Fanon found the agent through which the new world would be born.

The essays collected in *Towards an African Revolution* were written in the period between 1952 and 1961. By 1961 the cautious optimism of earlier fears had given way to the searing anger expressed in *The Wretched of the Earth.* Algeria was no longer the main focus of Fanon's experience: his world had expanded to include Africa and the other underdeveloped colonies in the throes of their struggles for liberation. The necessity of violence appeared everywhere. But the ethics of violence was only one part of an elaborate description of the more banal if no less dramatic struggle that marked the advancing phases of liberation. In *The Wretched of the Earth,* Fanon unleashed his terrible anger at the colonial world whose end he predicted. But he did not spare the

Kenneth Lamott's novel may well be a prophecy of things to come when the now generation carries the banner demanding:





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newly liberated men of Africa. He condemned the neocolonialism of the former mother country and the willing tools of its exploitation: the leaders, the new bourgeoisie, the real "proletariat," the privileged caste that is the first to benefit from the advantages of independence and the end of foreign rule. His analysis of political parties with their "ideological laziness" and their contemptible mistrust of the rural masses left no doubt as to where Fanon's allegiance lay. The major crime of the new politicians and the new parties was their separation from the land and the people. It was not the bourgeoisie as a socio-economic class he condemned, but its African version which had neither the economic base nor the intellectual support of the European past. Fanon saw the bourgeoisie of Africa and of underdeveloped countries as sycophantic: it is good for nothing; it is interested in its own betterment and it will transform the potential strength of party into the dead hand of an administration no better than its foreign predecessor. The dominance of the bourgeois politician leads to its practical dictatorship, its alliance with the army, its return to the colonial power for support.

The truth of the nation, Fanon felt, the spontaneous revolutionary fervor of which it disposes in the liberation struggle, these are to be found among the masses, among the rural peasants. The responsibility of the party, of the leaders who have not sold out, is to establish a link with the masses; and to the extent that it recognizes its responsibility it will lead the nation in the path of independence and fulfillment. Whether or not Fanon was right in his evaluation of the masses remains for the future to judge. That he was right in his devaluation of the cult of the leader, in the sterilization of party rule and in the alienation of the masses from its so-called representatives, is beyond doubt. This was Fanon's legacy, not merely the rationalization of violence but the socio-political ethics of reconstruction.

There is nothing cordial about Fanon or his writing. There is nothing friendly or sympathetic unless the unrestrained passion for purity in and of life be itself translated as friendliness and sympathy for being. Fanon was intolerant and believed with vehemence, as a true believer believes, that certain things, certain norms, certain traditions are not to be tolerated. In his letter to the Governor General of Algeria, written in 1956, and reproduced in *Towards an African Revolution,* Fanon declared that it was no longer possible for him to continue in his capacity as doctor of the psychiatric hospitals of Blida-Joinville. To collaborate in a society that destroys its subjects, whether one or all, is to collaborate in a ritual murder. There comes a time, wrote Fanon, when silence becomes a lie. To defy that lie, to eradicate the silence of

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complicity, Fanon wrote and acted with a conjunction that is both rare and eloquent. One may disagree with his analysis but one cannot hide from his anger without hiding from the conscience that preserves the memory of a better world.

Irene L. Gendzier

THE BURGESS MEMORANDUM

TREMOR OF INTENT. By Anthony Burgess. W. W. Norton. $4.95.

Anthony Burgess' new novel, his sixteenth, is advertised as a "levels" book with something for everybody, from the fellow who thinks of himself as enjoying spoofs on James Bond, to the responsible internationalist who wonders what the Cold War really means and fancies that novels will tell him about it, to, on the deepest level, the really thoughtful type for whom is provided an eschatological thesis, some meaty stuff about ultimate realities. Burgess served notice that such matters were to his concern when in a *TLS* discussion of the novel and religious experience, he came out for "the imaginative analysis of themes of sainthood, sin, the eschatological sanctions of behaviour, even that dangerous beatific vision." The list comes as no surprise to anyone who has read any of the previous sixteen novels in which secular heroes are usually taken, or take themselves, to task. Adultery and self-pity (*The Long Day Wanes*); pharisaical superiority to the herd (*The Right to an Answer*); alcoholic and sexual confusions (*Honey for the Bears*); all receive their appropriate comeuppances. And when in the final pages of *Tremor of Intent* ex-secret agent Denis Hillier turns out to be Father Hillier whose final word is the "Amen" which closes the novel (stern epigraphs from Auden and Eliot opened it), we may indeed feel in the presence of that Type of the Wise who soars but never roams, the Catholic Satirist. This does not seem a particularly new or exciting thing to be in the presence of.

But let us distinguish a bit. Burgess involves himself—through the exigencies of his style—in every tangle, mess or humiliation with which his hero is confronted. The novelist has no tie to do some behind-the-scenes smirking at his puppets if he really cares about how they move, if he verbally submits himself to them. These are perhaps feeble metaphors for Burgess' theatrical direction, but there are all kinds of directors and this one is married to his cast. Even bit players would tip their hats to an author who confers on them momentary splendor while behaving toward

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the reader as if this is what he might expect from any ordinary paragraph of any novel, leisurely developing itself.

There is some question as to what is developing. The Plot, of course. The book jacket pitches for inclusiveness: all the furniture of Bond (or is it parody of Bond, who cares?); all the disenchantment of a spy who comes in from the cold; characters who outshine their screen counterparts—like the villainous information-monger Mr. Theodorescu: "His hands were richly ringed, but this did not seem vulgar: they were so big, strong and groomed that the crusting of winking stones was rather like adornment by transitory flowers of acknowledged God-given instruments of skill and power and beauty. His body was so huge that the white dinner-jacket was like a moulded expanse of royal sailcloth. He was drinking what Hillier took to be neat vodka, a whole gill of it." —Sidney Greenstreet can barely live up to that. Nor can another creator of secret agents with whom Burgess has been compared, Graham Greene, whose Confidential Agent feels this upon disembarking in a foreign country: "Danger was part of him. It wasn't like an overcoat you sometimes left behind; it was your skin. You died with it; only corruption stripped it from you." By contrast, here is Burgess' hero, preparing to land at Yarylyuk:

> The horror was that he had no plan. He faced his fate, the fat laughers on deck their fun. There was always something inimical about the approach of land after long days at sea, . . . It was like the intrusion of the sforzandi of hearty visitors into the quiet rhythms of a hospital ward, or like the switching on of a raw electric bulb as the cosy afternoon of toe-toasting in the shadows, by the hypnotic cave of a Sunday fire, became church-going evening. . . . A dog barked somewhere in comforting international language. Tamburlaine and his sons, shabby in washed-out worker's blue, looked up at the British ship: cruel Tartar faces with *papirosi* burning under ample moustaches.

The abstract exercise of comparing Burgess with Fleming, or Le Carré or Graham Greene is plausible only by neglecting what makes all the difference, and what even Sidney Greenstreet was seldom provided with: a style that makes "horror" into an alliterative jingle ("faced . . . fate . . . fat . . . fun"), that reaches for the metaphor *juste* in an unabashed public-addressed way, then settles for the dog's bark and Tamburlaine's glance.

The question is how or whether this style can express the eschatological meanings Burgess seems to want it to. There is a good deal of talk about History being a bloody mess, the modern world a terrible

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place—and as the intrigue develops in all its awfulness such sentiments seem reasonable though not startling. The divine Clara, who reads "sex-in-the-head" books with titles like *Priapus—A Study of the Male Impulse* (somehow this good idea doesn't come off as well as it should) asks Hillier, who has fallen in love with her, what it all means: "Agents and spies and counterspies and secret weapons and dark cellars and being brainwashed. What are you all trying to do?" He replies,

> 'Have you ever wondered . . . about the nature of ultimate reality? What lies beyond all this shifting mess of phenomena? what lies beyond even God?
> 'Beyond God' . . . 'lies the concept of God. In the concept of God lies the concept of anti-God. Ultimate reality is a dualism of a game for two players. We—people like me and my counterparts on the other side—we reflect that game. It's a pale reflection. There used to be a much brighter one, in the days when the two sides represented what are known as good and evil. . . . But we don't believe in good and evil any more. That's why we play this silly and hopeless little game.'

Eventually Hillier refuses to play the game; as Clara's brother says to her at the end of the above speech, " 'Everything he's told us is religious,' " and the telling has its consequence. But is this "idea" or daring theological thesis much more than *The Spy Who Came In From The Cold* fancied up a bit and made comparatively agile through the presence of Burgess' lively mind? Perhaps this is enough; yet I found myself happier when the eschatology didn't advertise itself somewhat nervously, but emerged inevitably from the madness of events.

For example, the great mad event of the book is an eating contest aboard the luxury liner between Hillier and Mr. Theodorescu (for £1000 stakes) to the accompaniment of an aged orchestra: ("they made a virtue of the slow finger movements that arthritis imposed on them: Richard Rodgers became noble, processional"). The world exists to be eaten, from lobster medallions in a sauce cardinale through pheasant with pecan stuffing, spinach and minced mushrooms, forkfuls of onion and gruyère casserole ("Was it imagination, or was he having difficulty with the forkful of onion and gruyère casserole?") and tons of comparable dishes ending with dessert:

> They got through their sweets sourly. Peach mousse with sirop framboise. Cream dessert ring Chantilly with zabaglione sauce. Poires Hélène with cold chocolate sauce. Cold Grand Marnier pudding, Strawberry marlow. Marrons panaché vicomte. 'Look,' gasped Hillier, 'this sort of thing isn't my line at all. . . . I think I shall be sick.'

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> 'That's not allowed. That is not in the rules.'
> 'Who makes the rules?'
> 'I do.' Theodorescu poured Hillier a wonderful chill tumbler of frothing Blanquette. . . . 'How about some apple tart normande with Calvados?' asked Theodorescu. But Hillier had an apocalyptical vision of his insides—all that churned mess of slop and fibre, cream sluggishingly oozing along the pipes, the flavouring liqueurs ready to self-ignite, a frothing inner sea of souring wine. A small Indian township could have been nourished for a day on it all. This was the West that Roper had deserted. 'I give up,' he gasped. 'You win.'

And the secret agent proceeds to vomit it all up into the ocean, "that traditional vomitorium." Talk about the "apocalyptical vision" of one's insides seems wholly appropriate; the world exists to be thrown up, but in the process of demonstration by example Burgess gives us perhaps the most richly labeled social event since the wedding of Miss Fir Conifer in *Ulysses*. No other contemporary novelist comes close to this kind of superb comic realization, which, like Dickens and Joyce, should be read aloud in high heroic style. Yet, later on in the novel, after Clara's brother Alan kills an enemy, he too is sick, and the narrator adds, "His shoulders heaved as he tried to throw up the modern world." A perfect metaphorical fit, but also a sudden inadvertent smugness as if the novelist were suddenly congratulating himself on how neatly he'd turned things out.

Near the beginning of the novel Hillier's friend Roper writes a youthful letter about losing his faith: "I seem to have come very close to England since I stopped believing in Catholicism, close to the heart or essential nature of England I mean. What I find there is a sublime kind of innocence. England would take neither Catholicism nor Puritanism for very long—those faiths built on sin just rolled off like water from a duck's back." Sophomoric yearnings perhaps, and seemingly contradicted by Hillier's reappearance as a priest at the novel's end; yet as the book ends Father Hillier falls into depression, thinks about his "cold and lonely" bed, wonders whether there is anything behind the "cosmic imposture." Only the promise of a good dinner with champagne staves off deeper inanition. In an analogous way, the values testified to by Burgess' prose refuse to be modified by or enlarged into any higher (eschatological, if you will) values. *Tremor of Intent,* like Burgess' other novels is only as solid and satisfying on the whole as it is page by page. But page by page it is very satisfying indeed, asking to be reread and reexperienced, rather than pondered and then abstracted into a pungent message for our time.

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Does this leave us in a phantom esthetic house furnished wholly with the shapes and sounds of words by a writer who has nothing momentous to say and is therefore preoccupied with ways of saying it? Only if we insist, stubbornly and ungraciously, on regarding the "it" as doctrine to be finally revealed, rather than bodied forth in the sequential behavior of a voice. At first glance it might be thought odd that a book whose subjects include gluttony, satyriasis, covetousness, smacking self–regard and nagging self-disgust turns out to be not just human but humane; free of malice, superciliousness and puffed-up condescension, its comedy is as sane as Joyce's. Whatever happens to Father Hillier after his concluding "Amen," his creator has obeyed Empson's injunction and learned a style from a despair. That there are readers who may feel Burgess' stylistic company is not of the best, is, I suppose, a fact of life comparable to finding out that not all your friends like one another. Anthony Burgess, like Hillier in this novel, plays the secret-agent game of "being a good technician, superb at languages, agile, light-fingered, cool." But behind these ambiguous gifts, sentence by sentence, there stands revealed the man who wrote them, an extraordinary and attractive character whose like has been seldom seen.

William H. Pritchard

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ley; his most recent book was **The Sins of the Fathers; Hawthorne's Psychological Themes** (Oxford). Mr. Crews was a Fellow of the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences, at Stanford, last year. . . . **DAVID CAUTE** was a Fellow of All Souls College, 1959-65, resigning over College policy in 1965, cocrganizer of the Oxford Teach-in on Vietnam, June, 1965, and at present is Visiting Professor in the Schweitzer Program at N.Y.U. He has written several novels and books on politics. . . . **PETER CAWS** tells us "he is English, now Professor of Philosophy (and chairman of the dept.) at Hunter." Random House will publish his latest book, **Science and the Theory of Value**, in June. . . . **DAN JACOBSON** lives in London. His latest novel was **The Beginners**. . . . **MICHAEL ROLOFF** has just finished editing a volume of Nelly Sach's poems, which Farrar, Straus will publish. He is also the translator of many of the poems. . . . **IRENE L. GENDZIER** is an Assistant Professor of History at Boston University and Honorary Research Associate at the Center for Middle Eastern Studies at Harvard. Harvard recently published her **The Practical Visions of Ya'qub Sanu'**, an account of an Egyptian Jewish nationalist in the period 1839-1912. She is now working on two studies: a comparison of Frantz Fanon and Albert Memmit; and a reconsideration of the Arab Ba'th Socialist Party of Syria. . . . **WILLIAM H. PRITCHARD** teaches English at Amherst College, particularly modern poetry. He is also good at playing the piano and watching the Boston Celtics, he tells us, but asks us to excuse or ignore this immodesty.

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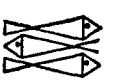

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